

A P R I L

2 5 C E N T S

BLUE BOOK

Stories of adventure for MEN, by MEN



ROCKY MOUNTAIN

A great novel by the author of "Wings North."

by ROBERT ORMOND CASE

THE MYSTERY OF JOHN SWIFT

Each year, for nineteen years, he had written to the police, confessing a new murder.

by WILLIAM BRANDON

CAIRO MIDNIGHT

A spirited post-war drama of the fight to win the peace.

by GORDON KEYNE



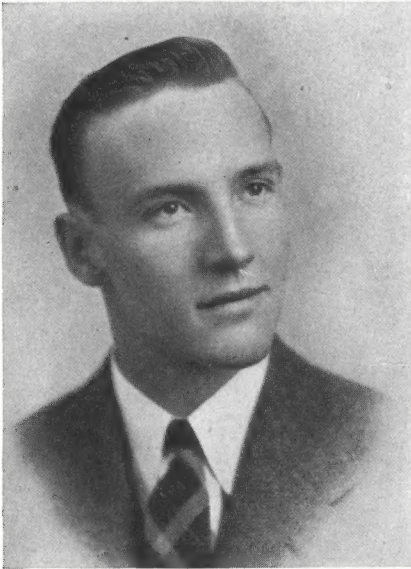
Edwin Rutt

Who's Who In this Issue

Edwin Rutt

THE author of the novel "Florida Fling" writes: "After leaving college (Princeton), I was a copy-writer in several New York advertising agencies. But after a number of years of this, I gave up advertising and turned to fiction-writing. Have been writing stories for about ten years, and have lived at various times in Canada, Bermuda, France, England and Australia. I am married, and am now living in the suburbs of New York for the duration."

Harden W. DeView



Harden W. DeView

BORN in Flint, Michigan, twenty-four years ago, when that town was the heart of the automobile industry. Have soaked up shop-talk ever since. My father and grandfather are both great factory men. I was six when I decided to become a writer, and eleven when I received my first rejection slip from *Open Road for Boys*.

I spent a very brief period in college, operating a tapping-machine on the graveyard-shift at night. Worked as a dishwasher in a beer-garden, during the late depression, collected rejection-slips for the stuff that I was writing. Went back into the shop in 1939 as a production inspector, then as office clerk, still collecting rejection slips. I am now in the largest shell-producing plant in the world; I work nine and ten hours a day six days a week, so I have to get up at three-thirty in the morning to write. And pinch me, I have just sold my first story!

I am married to a beautiful dark-eyed blonde who is also my secretary and critic. Am buying a little house in Birmingham, just outside of Detroit. Have a collie dog named Voltaire who has the family well trained.

Like bass fishing, gardening, and reading. Have a passion for beer, and blues blown on a hot trumpet.

My greatest ambition is to write a novel about the automobile industry, because I believe its workers have contributed more to civilization as we know it today than any other single group. I know these workers thoroughly and love them well, and I am working like the devil to tell their story.

Robert Ormond Case

FIRST saw the light of day—a hot day, I'm told—in Dallas, Texas, October 8th, 1896. Father was in publishing business there, which went broke in one of the minor depressions (then known simply as panics) of the era. Father and mother being Canadian, the family moved from Texas to Victoria, B. C.,—R. O. C. accompanying them, age 18 months.

Attended public schools in Victoria, learned to hunt, fish, swing an ax. Shot a deer with a .22 rifle at the age of twelve, a major experience. Athletically inclined. At the age of fifteen won third place in the Provincial Junior championships (three competitors in finals). At the age of fifteen, family (including ten children, of which R. O. C. was No. 5) moved to Oregon, R. O. C.'s permanent locale since—permanent in that it is the locale to which he always returns.

Attended high school and University of Oregon (B.A. 1920). During vacations from high school and college worked at every major industry of the Northwest except mining and commercial fishing. The list includes: dairy farm in western Oregon (from which gained data for

Hollander series in *Country Gentleman*); wheat-farming in Eastern Oregon (from which came data for "*Golden Hills*," a wheat-ranch novel published serially); logging camps (data for "*Big Timber*"), sawmills, railroad construction, bridge-building, river-boat etc. Also numerous trips to Alaska (data for Alaskan serials published in the *Saturday Evening Post*).

World War I came along while R. O. C. was a sophomore at the University of Oregon. Joined Coast Artillery three days before war was declared, on theory C.A.C. was going overseas immediately. Went overseas eight months later (January, 1918). Eleven months in England and France. Seventy-two consecutive days at Front with 65th Artillery, including five major engagements. No wounds, no glory, plenty of mud. Entered as buck private. Due to diligence, aptitude in military science, etc., emerged with rank of corporal. At close of war reentered the University, graduated, went into newspaper work; two years later began to write. Fourteen novels to date. (For titles see "Who's Who in America.")

Married; four children. Home, Portland, Oregon.

BLUE BOOK

April, 1943

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(Copyright, 1942 and 1943, by the North American Newspaper Alliance. Excerpts reprinted by special permission of the publisher, Houghton Mifflin Co.)*
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Except for stories of Real Experiences, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events. If the name of any living person is used, it is a coincidence

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Published monthly at McCall St., Dayton, Ohio. Subscription Offices—Dayton, Ohio. Editorial and Executive Offices—230 Park Ave., New York, N. Y. THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE, April, 1943. VOL. LXXVI, No. 6. Copyright, 1943, by McCall Corporation. All rights reserved in the United States, Great Britain and in all countries participating in the Pan American Copyright Convention and the International Copyright Union. Reprinting not permitted except by special authorization. Subscription Prices: one year \$2.50, two years \$4.00. Extra in Canada, 50 cents per year; foreign \$1.00 per year. For change of address give us four weeks' notice and send old address as well as new. Special Notice to Writers and Artists: Manuscripts and art material submitted for publication in the Blue Book Magazine will be received only on the understanding that the publisher and editors shall not be responsible for loss or injury thereto while such manuscripts or art material are in the publisher's possession or in transit. Printed in U.S.A.

Entered as second-class matter, November 12, 1930, at the Post Office at Dayton, Ohio, under the Act of March 3, 1897.

READERS' COMMENT

RED-WHITE-AND-BLUE BOOK?

Verily, BLUE BOOK should be called "Red, White and Blue Book," for every time I finish its contents, I am moved to go out and add to my quota of War Bonds. And hundreds of persons, I imagine, are inspired to similar action through reading your magazine. For so many of your stories could be grouped under the thrilling heading: Here Is The War!

What a delightful straight-punch-in-the-nose of the carping critics, the drugstore generals and the garage admirals these stories are! What a slap-in-the-jaw to the kickers on rationing, the chiselers, the hoarders and the rumor-mongers!

BLUE BOOK brings back to us the bravery of our boys, thus inspiring us to back 'em up more strongly!

Fred B. Mann,
Danville, Ill.

FICTION TO THE POINT

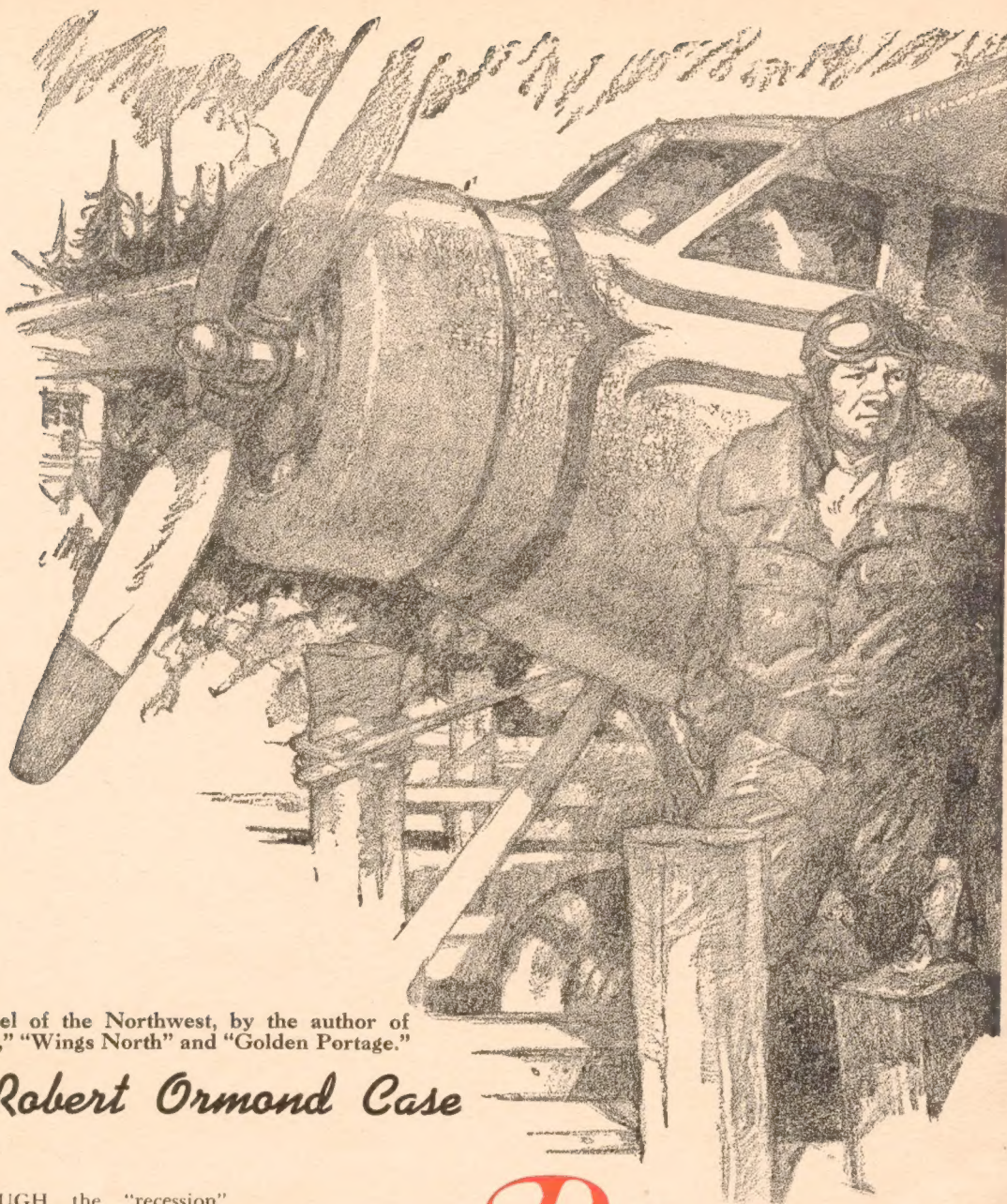
"Peace Hath Her Victories" by Gordon Keyne is fearless and to the point. I hope to see more articles and stories of this nature in BLUE BOOK. Upon you who wield the mighty pen rests the responsibility of bringing the David Judsons together. The obstacles to the Four Freedoms are not to be underestimated by any thinking person. In his story, Mr. Keyne has perhaps unwittingly referred to one of them. In the first column—page seventeen of the January issue—the character, Seymour Holles (Governor of The Bank of England) says: "A change in our system of government has no terrors for me."

Compare this with a statement made by Baron Rothschild over a hundred years ago: "Give me control of the issue of a nation's currency, and I care not who makes its laws." There are few countries upon the globe today who do not face this most important obstacle. If anyone thinks that we do not face it here in the United States—let them read up on Andrew Jackson and Abraham Lincoln. They had little use for the Baron but they could keenly appreciate the truth of his statement.

B. W. Munro,
Redding, Calif.



WAR BONDS AND STAMPS
FOR VICTORY



A great novel of the Northwest, by the author of
 "Big Timber," "Wings North" and "Golden Portage."

by *Robert Ormond Case*

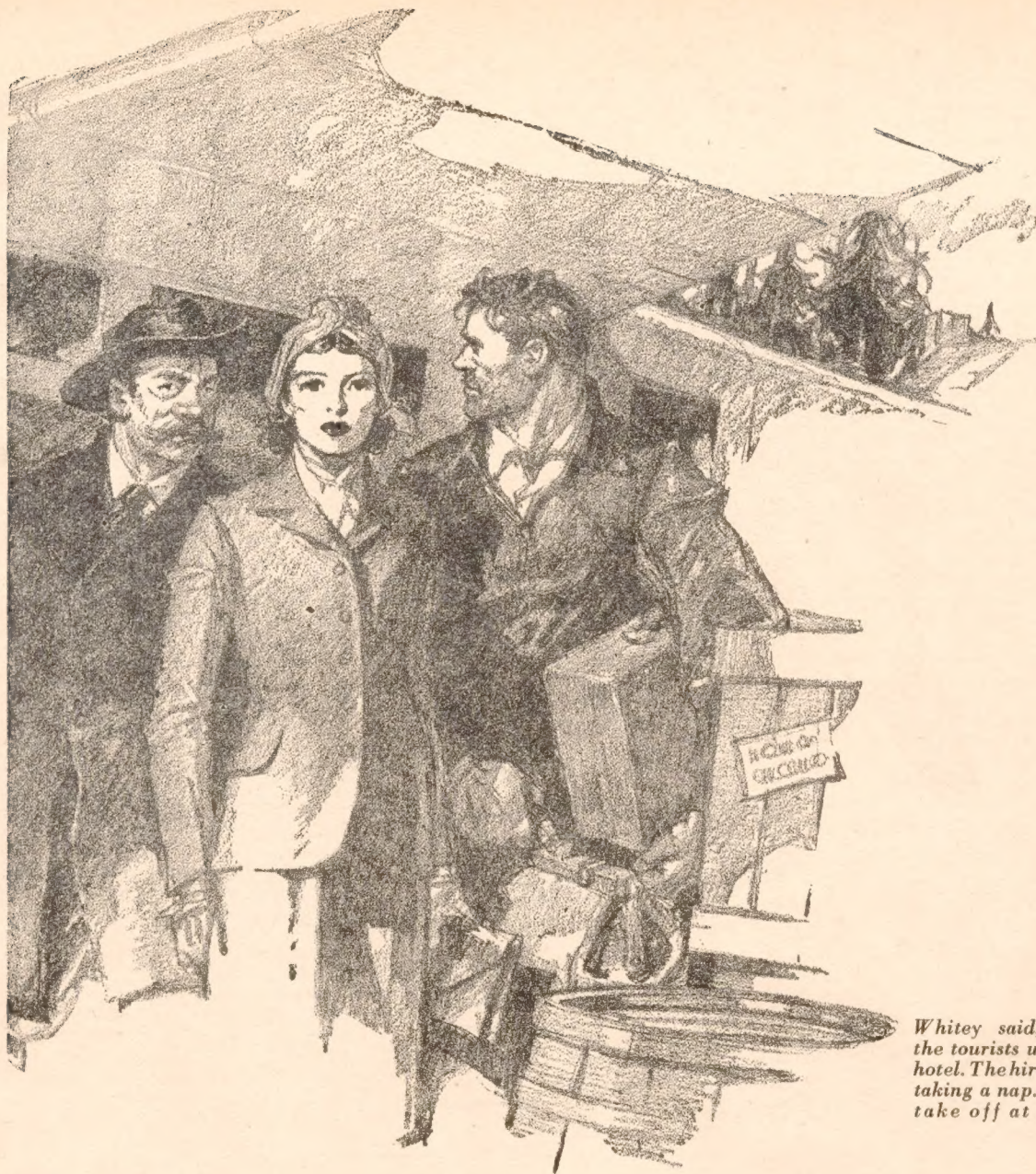
THOUGH the "recession" was in full swing in Seattle that fall, following the '37 peak, the massive lobby of the Chanford was crowded. Bill Kennedy saw why, as he followed the baggage-festooned bellboy toward the desk, his hat pulled low over his haggard eyes. Twin banners announced that two exceedingly diverse conventions—Western Cattlemen and Northwest Teachers—had lit here for the week-end. Chattering and booming delegates were everywhere.

Bill was thankful for these wheeling mobs, for they afforded cover

through which he could steal unobserved. The Chanford was the favorite rendezvous for the hard-rock and placer fraternity of the Northwest, and old-timers had a habit of lurking among the palms and pillars like wolves in a thicket, hungry for the

sight of a familiar face. Always before, it had brought a thrill of pride when one of these rickety lobos would pounce upon him, with: "Hold on there—aint you Hod Kennedy's young one? Reg'lar block off the old chip, aint you? How's Hod making out

ROCKY



Whitey said, "Take the tourists up to the hotel. The hired man's taking a nap. We can take off at noon."

MOUNTAIN

over to Sumpter Valley? . . . Well, sir, I knew your dad clean back to the Klondike. There was a stalwart citizen, in any language! I remember once, up on the Stewart—"

And so on and on. Bill wanted none of that tonight. Hod Kennedy's fu-

neral was less than forty-eight hours old; and the blow had been too savage, his wounds too deep, even for the completely honest sympathy of these ancient battlers of the line. A hundred plans, a thousand father-and-son associations, had been buried on that

wind-swept ridge above Sumpter Valley.

Moreover, news traveled fast via the mining grapevine. Here at the Chanford, and in remote camps from the Cœur d'Alènes to the Seward Peninsula, the thing that had broken Hod Kennedy and brought him prematurely to the grave would be known and profanely discussed. The unforgiving old-timers would be muttering over it now. Red Schafer had stolen Hod's string of 'A-I' claims over there at Sumpter. His manner of doing it had been similar to sneaking up on Hod with a splitting-ax. How come, they

would want to know, that Red Schafer was still running at large, unremorseful and fancy-free?

Bill had already found the answer in his own turmoil of thought: an apathetic, "The hell with it!" To run Schafer down and take him apart physically would not change the record, savagely delightful as the chore might be. It couldn't bring Hod Kennedy back. It couldn't recover the claims. Hod himself had said, in their last hour together: "Forget it, son. I've made big money betting on men. On Red, I lost. Just call it the luck of the draw, Bill, and go on from there."

SAM PACKARD's familiar face beamed at the desk; Sam—fat, smooth-cheeked and jovial—was the assistant manager of the Chanford. He and Bill had been classmates and members of the same tong at Washington.

"Hi, Bill!" He gripped Bill's hand and looked keenly into his face. "Sorry about your dad."

Bill nodded. "Got a room for me?" "Always, m'lad. The best in the city." He offered a cigarette and Bill took it, leaning there for comfort. He could talk to Sam.

"What are your plans, Bill?"

"I haven't any. Start scouting around Monday, I guess." This was Saturday night. "I'm starting from scratch."

"Look," Sam said. "What kind of a deal did Red Schafer pull up there? These old boys have been pestering me."

Bill winced. "I'll tell you about it sometime. . . . No, they might as well have it straight. Listen!"

He explained Schafer's shell-game briefly. Schafer had been on his father's pay-roll for years. He, Bill, had never liked Schafer, had warned the older man against him. This summer, while Bill had been up on the dredges at Dawson, had come the pay-off. Hod had acquired a touch of bronchitis and had been over at Hot Lake, basking it out. Schafer had brought over a lot of routine papers to sign—receipts and what-not. Included was a transfer of title, to Schafer, of claim Number Twelve.

Hod had promised Schafer Number Twelve, as a five-year bonus. He had been feeling low that day, and had given the transfer the merest glance. The interne and male nurse who had witnessed the transfer knew nothing about claim descriptions. . . .

Weeks later, hearing nothing from Schafer, Hod had gone out to the creek. An Intermountain dredge was already there, digging in. Intermountain had bought the whole creek from Schafer, for cash. All titles were recorded and legal. Hod had unknowingly transferred *all* the claims to Schafer—and Schafer was gone.

"You're letting him get away with it?" Sam demanded, his face flushed with loyal rage. "How come, fella?"

Bill explained how come. Intent to defraud was hard to prove. Intermountain had bought in good faith and was prepared to defend its title up to the Supreme Court, if necessary. It was Schafer's word against Hod's. Hod Kennedy could not now be called to the witness stand.

"I may cross Red's trail somewhere," Bill concluded, his lips thin. "I won't look for him. Monday, I'm looking for a job." He got out his wallet, extracted two hundred fifty in currency and slid it across the desk. "Salt this for me, Sam. It leaves fifty for a little relaxation. As a starter, where do I get a good steak?"

"One block up the avenue, two south. Jake's Place." Sam eyed Bill doubtfully. "I dunno, son. In the shape you're in—"

"Thanks," Bill said. "Are they still running a dice-game over at Di Silva's?"

Sam sighed. "Yeah. Call me if you get in a jam."

The clerk coughed apologetically. "Here's a note for you, Mr. Kennedy. The gentleman left it this morning. He's been in several times."

Bill opened the note and read the signature first. A twinkle warmed in his bleak eyes as he deciphered the main body of the message:

Bill Kennedy:

I read about Hod in the paper up at Prince Rupert, so I flew right down. (I mean flew—I travel in style nowadays. A little cabin ship that cost me twenty grand, with a pilot throwed in. Good pilot.) Aimed to see you at the funeral but got grounded here by the blasted fog. Phoned Sumpter Valley and they said you'd be at a hovel called the Chanford. I'm at the Malvern, a plenty swank roost. Call me here. I'm on a deal in which there's a big edge for the house, and I'm cutting you in. Your dad done me a good turn once, up to Birch Creek in '96, and at this late date I'm paying off. Call me without fail.

Yours truly,

J. H. Flynn.

Bill showed the note to Sam. "Read that, Sam. Then tell me what you deduce about the gentleman known as Rocky Flynn."

Sam read it, and his first reaction was professional pique. "Hovel?" he said, scandalized. "And him staying at that gilded bat-roost? . . . Sounds good, Bill. A prosperous old sourdough r'aring to do you a good turn." He passed the note back. "Looks as if your luck's changed, son. Better ride it."

Bill smiled outright, for the first time in days. "Which shows how

Rocky manages to struggle along in this vale of tears. He's the crookedest snake that ever crawled from under a forked stick, Sam. And the most plausible. D'ye know what that episode was up at Birch Creek? They'd decided to hang him. Dad talked them out of it. The reason he isn't registered here is because he knew some old-timer would recognize him—and probably shoot him on sight."

"He did sort of sidle up to the desk," the clerk recalled. "There'd be a crowd here; then they'd thin out, and there he'd be. A little, unobtrusive sort of a man. But tough."

"That's him," said Bill. "That's old Rocky. Good men die like flies around him, and there he is. It makes you wonder why." He thrust the note into his pocket, his face darkening. "Well, I'll get along to the room. If Rocky pops up again, tell him I just left."

"You aren't even going to call him?" Sam accused. "He flew all the way down from Prince Rupert to see you."

"All the way," Bill agreed. "Sure, I'll call him tomorrow, or Monday."

He followed the bellboy to the elevator, which was filling up fast. A bevy of schoolteachers huddled in the rear like suspicious quail. Bulky cattlemen crowded in after Bill, genial and red-faced, surrounded by an aroma of cigars and hard liquor. At the last moment a little man dashed in from the shadow of an adjacent pillar and wedged himself among the bulging paunches of the front rank.

"Sorry, sir. This car's full."

"I'll pull in my stummick," said the newcomer, his voice husky and ingratiating. "Let 'er ramble, son."

As the elevator shot skyward, Bill peered down over the broad shoulders ahead of him, scowling. The little man was wearing a battered black hat in whose flat crown an ancient trout-hook was imbedded. Below its lowered brim was a segment of leathery cheek, bulging with an enormous chew, and a faded mustache that drooped over a craglike, truculent jaw.

Bill relaxed, shrugging. It was too late now to run for it. He had seen Rocky Flynn only once before, and that eight years ago, but he was the type that stands apart for no apparent reason in the faceless crowds of memory. "Might as well get it over with," he thought. "Listen to him, then brush him off gently. After all, he knew Dad."

CHAPTER TWO

AT the seventh floor the little man stepped off first and stood aside. Bill followed the bellboy out and said casually: "Come on along, Rocky. Never mind the sleuth act. How's tricks?"

Rocky did not start, though taken by surprise. He fell into step, peering up into Bill's face, his eyes pale blue and deceptively mild under shaggy brows.

"As a sleuth," he stated, "I'm a danged good blacksmith. I knew you right off, on account of Hod. How in tunket did you know me?"

"You forget Telegraph Creek," Bill said. "I was there with Dad that summer. You were panhandling, down by the freight-sheds."

Rocky hunched his shoulders. "Y' would bring up that depressin' interlood. Yeah, that camp didn't do right by me. I finally quit 'em. . . . Which is plenty in the past now, boy. Way back, and down. You got my note?"

Bill nodded. "We'll discuss it—fast."

"Don't you get socially entangled," Rocky warned. "Nor start blazing trails." Again his faded eyes studied Bill's face. "I know what ails you, son. When I read about Hod, I busted down and howled like a wolf—and came a-running. I heard about Red Schafer's deal. I know you're broke and down in the mouth. . . . But don't you be that way any more, Bill, on account I'm sitting in. Which means it's daylight in the swamps. Whichever way you go from here, it gets better."

"Sounds good," said Bill, with a gloomy twinkle.

HE couldn't help but warm to old Rocky Flynn—that decrepit wolf in sheep's clothing. He wore a mask of homely virtue through which he peered humorously, unabashed. And he was not too decrepit, at that, Bill saw. He was short but broad, with long arms and battle-scarred knuckles. He was certainly past sixty years, having seen Chilkoot and the roaring Klondike; yet age had touched him lightly. He walked with a solid, rolling gait, and much daylight showed between his stocky knees.

The room was large and cheerful. The bellboy planted the baggage and put up the shades. Bill tipped him. "Anything else, sir?"

"No."

"Yeah," said Rocky. From his right hip pocket he produced a flat flask, which he placed on the table. From the left pocket he took out a substantial roll of bills and peeled off the top one carelessly. "Rustle up some glasses and some of that there fizz-water, son. Keep the change."

Bill started to protest, then waved the boy on. After all, there was plenty of time.

"Make yourself comfortable," he told Rocky, tossing his trench-coat on the bed. "I'll freshen up a little."

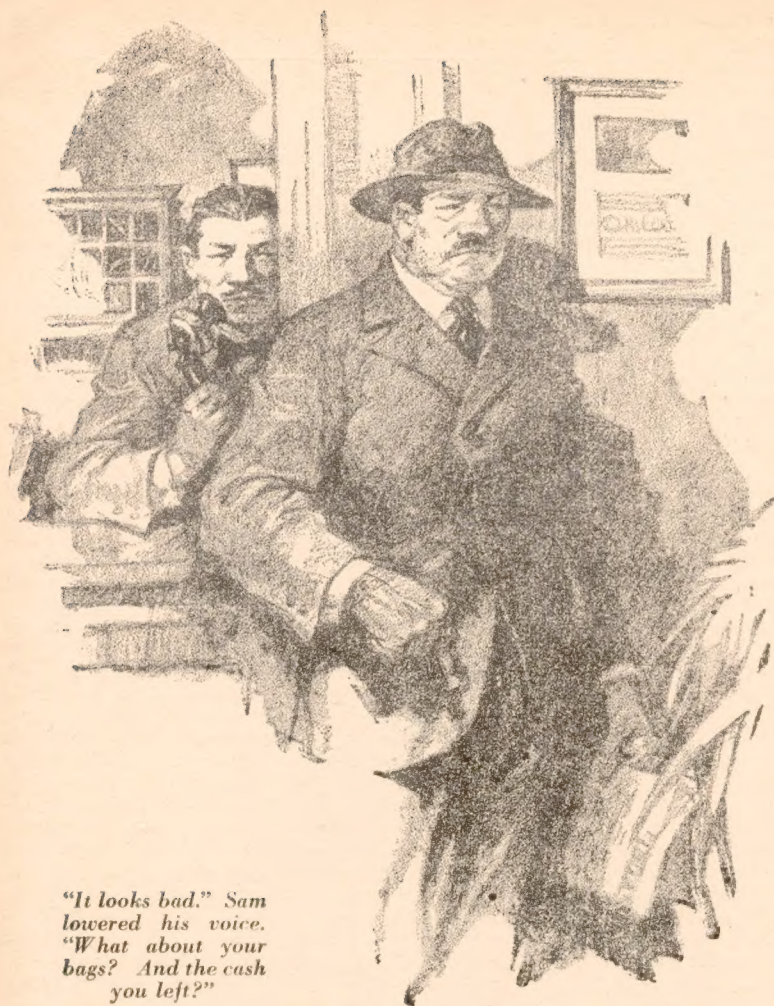
As he combed his hair in the glittering bathroom, his reflection peered back at him—lean-jawed, somber. He looked trim and athletic in leather



jacket, whipcord breeches and high-laced pacs. It was the same outfit in which he had flown down from Dawson when word had come out to the dredges that Hod Kennedy had less than forty-eight hours to live. He debated changing, then decided against

it. He wouldn't be going to any of the uptown dives—just Jake's Place, which shouldn't be swanky. And De Silva's, where no holds were barred.

When he came out, the bellboy had come and gone, and Rocky had two stiff drinks poured. Rocky was wait-



"It looks bad," Sam lowered his voice. "What about your bags? And the cash you left?"

ing politely, perched on the edge of one of the beds.

Bill took up a glass and sniffed it. "Hm-m. Hudson's Bay!" He grinned a bit wryly. It was the favorite of old-timers of a generation before, the potent "squareface" of Yukon camps. "You drink that stuff straight?"

"Pollute yours with fizz-water if you've a mind to," Rocky invited. "I like to feel her hit."

Bill nodded. "I'll try it once, this being an occasion. Here's how."

"Wait," said Rocky.

He came to his feet, took off his hat and stood erect. The act touched him with dignity and force. Above his pugnacious nose, which was pitted and blue from ancient frostbite, his forehead and thinning thatch of hair was interlaced with many scars. Bill recalled that his father had conceded one sterling virtue to Rocky, a touch of pure metal buried deep: when the bluffing was over and the free-for-all began, Rocky would be there.

"Most folks have plenty friends, Bill," he said. "I had one. . . . Let's drink to Hod."

Bill studied his glass unseeingly for a moment. Why not? In this moment—it was one of the few—Rocky was sincere. He said: "To James MacGregor Kennedy—a gentleman who accepted his winnings without boasting, his losses without complaint. And met his final showdown with dignity."

"That's telling it. You got the education, son." Rocky raised his glass, blinking. "Sleep sound, Hod—where there aint any frost and the wind don't blow."

They drank, and Bill gasped. The impact of it was searing.

"Lawsyl!" he gasped. "Great snares and bear-traps!"

"It aint nectar," said Rocky, his mustache curling. "It aint dew. She hits."

One drink led to another. Bill knew it was a dangerous business on an empty stomach and in his battered

emotional state. This searing liquid was potent. And on the other hand, why not? A long night and a long life lay ahead. His inner tenseness was relaxing, a lately overwhelming sense of desolation mellowing. His ordinarily good-natured outlook was getting up from the canvas, groggy but ready for business.

Old Rocky was a card. Talking apparently at random and in the profane or humorous vein the subject demanded, he managed to explore such various fields as Bill's plans for the future, which were non-existent; his opinion on women in business, which was low; and his present feeling toward Red Schafer, who had done Hod Kennedy wrong.

Bill tried to side-step that angle. "Let's hurry by Red Schafer."

"He's in town," Rocky insisted. "I've seen him around." His eyes were bleached and intent. "You mean to say you aint got some notion, son, the kind that sort of crawls and itches and burns inside of you, but that you'd want to meet up with him?"

Bill glanced at his watch, which was blurred a little. "Look—it's after nine. I haven't eaten yet."

That diverted Rocky. "Son of a gun—and I've et hours ago! Let's go. I'll trail along and set with you."

"Sorry," said Bill, not unkindly. "I'm lone-wolfing it tonight. A steak down at Jake's Place, then prowls a little. De Silva's, maybe. That's a gambling dive."

"Don't I know it?" said Rocky, sadly. "Leave one puddle in the desert, and I fall into it. Middle of the alley, below Jake's Place." That fact seemed to catch his interest. He pondered it, studying Bill without expression. He nodded: "Yeah—"

"What's on your mind, Rocky?" Bill prompted. "You mentioned a deal."

Rocky pulled himself together. "It's cutthroat," he said. "I wouldn't fool you, son—it's a racket. But your part of it's clean—clean as a hound's tooth."

HE explained the deal, and Bill recognized it almost from the first words as one of the oldest phonies in the mining world. Rocky had organized a stock company to develop an alleged body of ore up above the Finlay River, on the west slope of the Rockies. It was on a remote lake, accessible only by airplane.

"Times has changed," Rocky explained, with engaging candor. "It used to be we'd dig a hole in a cliff, up some hell-roarin' creek in which there was boulders as big as hayricks. Too tough a trail for the average pilgrim. Still, if they insisted, there the hole was. Evidence that we'd performed. . . . These airplanes make it a cinch. This lake's so far up in them blasted mountains it even scares me when we fly in."

"But you've actually got a hole there," said Bill, amused.

"Sure we got a hole there. We don't just slug our customers and run. There's a nice big tunnel in the cliff. Tailings spilling down to the lake. It looks more like a mine than a real producer. The lake aint even on the map, so I named it. Luna Lake."

"Pretty name. Looks good in the moonlight, eh?"

"It's got nothin' to do with the moon. Just a touch of sentiment, believe it or not." Rocky blinked diffidently. "I got a squaw up Fort Nelson way. Rosy-cheeked that-a-way, and healthy as a clover. Good trapper and wood-splitter. Name of Luna."

Bill grinned. "Why, Rocky!"

"She's insurance," Rocky defended himself. "Some day when I'm old and broken down, and the wolves are closing in, I'll come sneaking in from the brush along the Dease. I may be in rags, and limping, but to Luna I'll still be that there knight in shining armor. What was that boiler-plated critter's name? Gallagher?"

"Galahad," said Bill, chuckling. "Okay, Rocky."

IT seemed that Rocky had sold stock in the venture to the tune of a hundred and ten thousand dollars. He and his partner, Whitey Bodine, the pilot of the ship, had split this considerable pot and proceeded to the routine business of scuttling the company. This was usually the easiest part of it. Stock assessments—levied to run a new drift in an attempt to pick up the lost vein—usually caused the most stubborn and optimistic share-holder to take to the hills.

But a joker had developed. Rocky had permitted a woman capitalist to buy in—an admittedly gross error in judgment. He couldn't resist it; she'd looked like a female Santa Claus. She had not only put in sixty thousand originally, but had ante'd another twenty in assessments. Now she couldn't be shaken off.

"It aint the money," Rocky explained, sadly. "She's so filthy prosperous that that eighty grand is peanuts. It's the principle of the thing. It's like she's bet at the races and her goat comes in last, and she's lost face. She aims to get action up there at Luna Lake—or else. She means it. She's tough. She's got that hard-boiled MacRae streak in her."

"MacRae?"

Rocky spread his hands. "That's who she is, Bill. I shut my eyes and shoot at the moon, and that's what I fetch down, feathers an' all. The granddaughter of old Alexander MacRae, in person."

Bill whistled. Rocky had certainly aimed high. The MacRaes, in west-

ern Canada, had once been as the Rothschilds to the continent, the house of Morgan to international finance. Old Alec MacRae had built up the towering fortunes of the clan. The socialite third generation, as usual, were industriously scattering the winnings.

"Not Ruth MacRae, is she, by any chance?"

"That's her." Rocky stared at him.

"You know her?"

"Not exactly; not socially, y'know." Bill was surprised at the force of the old smoldering humiliation. Good Lord, that was eleven years ago! Kid stuff. "It was at Shawnigan Lake, on Vancouver Island. While Dad was prospecting up above, I batched in a cabin on the West Arm. Ruth was staying with her mother in a swank lodge called the Strathcona. I crossed over each day and went swimming with the rest of the young ones, on the Strathcona dock. Didn't give it a thought. I was sixteen. Ruth was fourteen. She was plump and had freckles and wore pigtails. I liked her. I didn't know who she was—or care."

"Until Mamma caught up with you," said Rocky, sagely.

"Until Ruth did. We were out canoeing, and I stopped at the shack to get my .22, so I could show her what a fancy shot I was. She was horrified. She said: 'Do you live here?' When I said I did, she said: 'Take me back to the dock, quick.' At the dock she said: 'I'm so humiliated. My word—I thought you were one of us!' Then she marched off."

"Fawncy that!" said Rocky. His mustache curled. "Yeah. After that, there was tufts on your ears and thumbs on your feet."

Bill shrugged. "That's all there was to it. I just didn't go swimming on the Strathcona dock that afternoon—or ever!" He didn't tell Rocky how fresh and undimmed was his memory of Ruth MacRae. Pigtails and freckles. . . . Who said that calf love was never eternal? Or that a wound to callow pride healed quickly? "I'm getting drunk," he thought, draining his glass. It was his fourth—or fifth—and all had hit.

He got up abruptly, and the room wheeled about him. He made his way to the window while Rocky watched him, poker-faced. He pulled down the sash and leaned there, drinking in the raw night air. The late rain had ceased, but a wind from the north still swept down the man-made cañon. Mists were thinning overhead. A few dim stars shone there, and a fragment of pale moon.

His head cleared a little, but inner fires were smoldering and spreading. The time had come to brush Rocky off. Unless he ate soon, he'd be stiff as a plank.

"Okay, Rocky. Where do you figure me in?"

"For five thousand bucks. For two days' work."

"Too much. To do what?"

Rocky twisted to face him more fully. "Just fly up to Luna Lake with us. Look the hole over and tell her my story's correct—the pay's petered out. Tell her she's lost her eighty grand, and she might as well sign off and call it a day. It's one of the risks of mining."

Bill shook his head, his amusement tinged with annoyance. Rocky certainly had known from the beginning that he would have no part of it. No reputable engineer would.

Still, he was curious. "Why me? Vancouver's full of engineers."

"Sure. And they've all got a grudge against the MacRaes. It's one of them traditions in B.C. You're a rank outsider. You're the only name I mentioned that she'd even listen to. She's heard of Hod. She figures you'd be honest. . . .

"Now, wait, son." Rocky got up and did not sway. He went to the window and leaned opposite Bill, studying his face. "You *would* be honest. There the hole is. It's haywire. No engineer living could do more than guess how much capital had been sunk in it. . . . Look, we take off around midnight. Prince Rupert by sunup. At noon tomorrow we're at Luna Lake. By Wednesday you're back again, with five thousand smackers in your jeans. Clean money. Is that a start in life?"

"For somebody," Bill agreed. "Not me." He pushed away from the window and looked at his watch. "Sorry, old son."

Rocky followed him, his ragged mustache quivering. "You won't go for it a-tall?" Act or not, he seemed completely disheartened. "Five thousand bucks just to get her to sign off?"

"Why?" Bill was curious. "What's it to you whether she signs off or not?"

"Because, doggone it, I gave her control for that last twenty grand. She owns Luna Lake."

"So what? Let her have it. You admit it's worthless."

ROCKY spread his hands. "You don't get the picture. She don't want Luna Lake. What she craves now is to see my hide stretched on the fence. With the ears missing. 'Less I satisfy her at once that everything's been on the up and up—*pronto*, forthwith, by Monday at the latest—she turns the wolves loose. Those Mining Office boys are tough. The Provincial Police wouldn't give no more than six months' pay to see me and Whitey behind bars. . . . That's what I'm up against, Bill."

Bill chuckled outright. Rocky had been smoked out at last. He hadn't come rushing to offer aid, but to ask for it. And yet, according to his nature, Rocky looked upon himself as an open-handed benefactor, engaged in squaring old debts.

"Don't you say no, cold turkey," Rocky warned. He backed to the bed, took up his battered hat and pulled it low over his eyes. "Not a word now, until you've et. I hadn't ought to have put it up to you on an empty stummick. I never dreamt—" He broke off, backing toward the door. "I'm still figuring you in, Bill. I've got to. . . . I'll see you around. At Jake's maybe."

"Come along now," Bill invited, remorsefully. "It's all right. At least have a shot of coffee with me—"

But Rocky was gone.

Bill stared at the closed door for a moment, scratching his head. Then he shrugged cheerfully, peering about him. That was that. Next on the program was the steak at Jake's. . . . He went to the window and looked out. The stars were brighter overhead; the threat of rain was gone. He decided to leave his hat and coat behind; the chill wind would feel good.

CHAPTER THREE

HE left his key at the desk and went out into the engulfing traffic. First corner north, Sam had said; two to the left. He quitted the brilliantly lighted avenue and turned into the shadows, downhill.

The waterfront was outspread below. Ten thousand city lights flamed and glittered in a vast crescent along the Sound. The smell of fish and tar and hemp rolled in with the wind. A hint of tide-flats was there and a haunting breath from farther kelp-lined shores. This had, Bill saw, the makings of a beautiful night.

He strode on and down, face upturned, weaving and stumbling a little. The hill was steep, and it was growing steeper. When he passed the first intersection, which was level, the next jump-off was incredible. He started down it firmly, nevertheless, and suddenly saw to his horror that the street was tilting downward and inward below him. It was sheer as a wall, and he was falling. He clutched at a lamp-post, found it falling too.

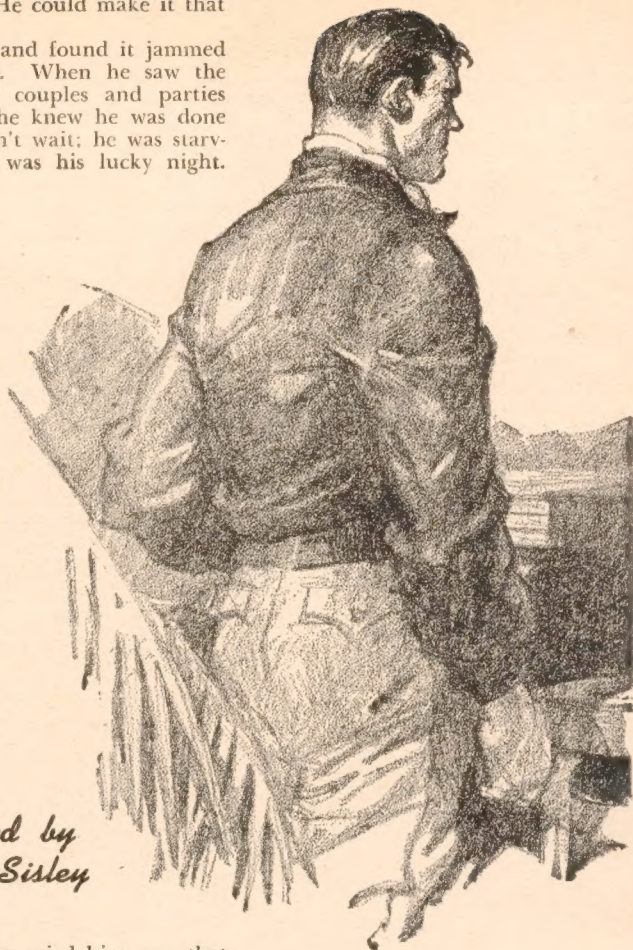
"Hang on to it, buddy," advised a passer-by, grinning. "It almost got away from you, that time."

"Yes sir," said Bill, with dignity. "Thank you, sir." ("He means well," he thought benevolently, "but he's crazier than a snake. He thought I was drunk.")

He saw that the street was dangerous but passable, and went on warily. Jake's Place was below, in the middle

of the block. He could make it that far.

He made it, and found it jammed with customers. When he saw the long queue of couples and parties waiting there, he knew he was done for. He couldn't wait; he was starving. But this was his lucky night.



*Illustrated by
Raymond Sisley*

The head waiter spied him, saw that he was alone and beckoned him in.

"T-bone," he said with a sigh. He was snugly established in one of the small alcoves that flanked the glittering room. "Hash-browns. Never mind the soup. . . . Soup?" He shuddered. "No—no soup."

"Yes sir. Dinner wines?"

"It's an idea," Bill agreed. His thought processes were entirely clear; he knew logic when he saw it. "An excellent idea." He studied the wine list and found sparkling Burgundy, imported stock. "There you are," he said triumphantly. "A bottle."

"Yes, sir."

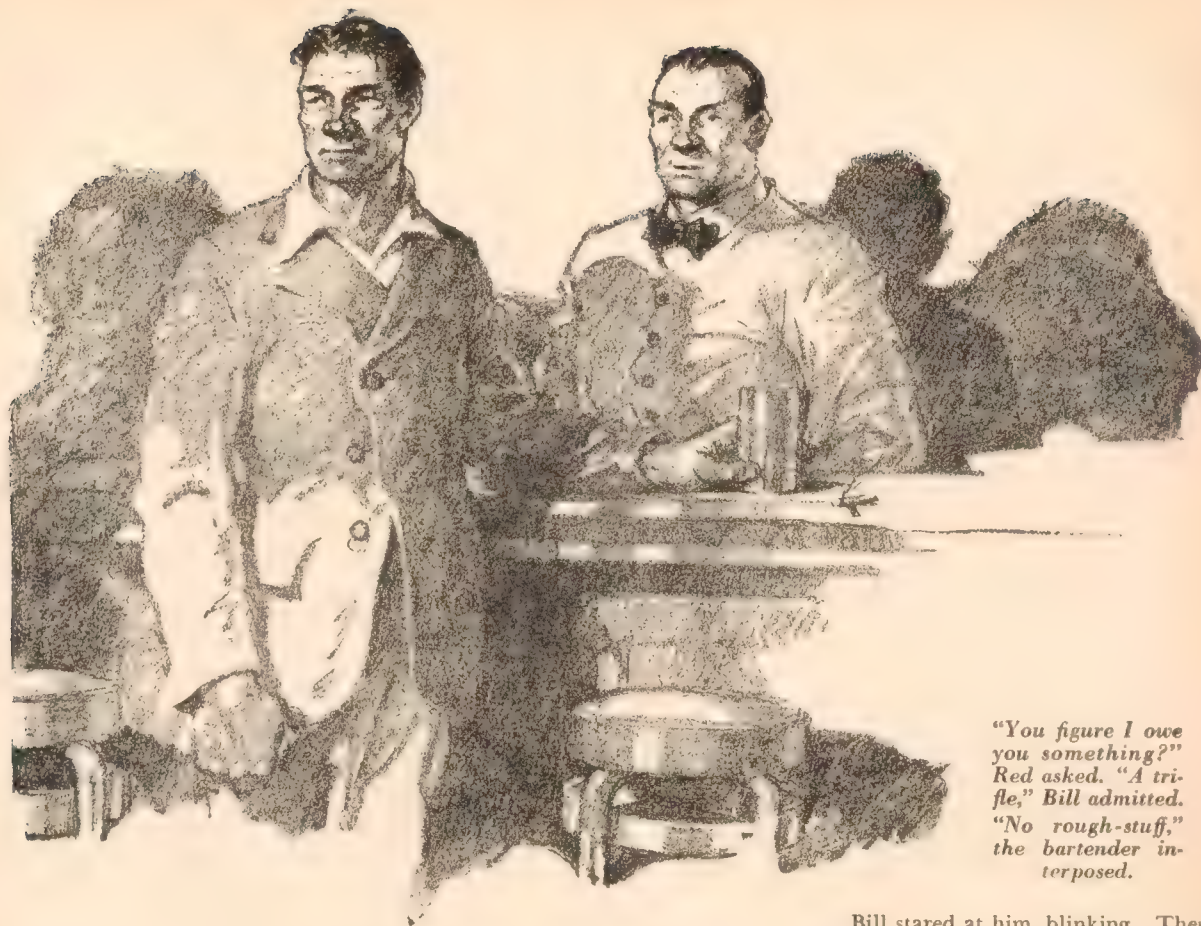
The steak was good. Except that the first three glasses suggested mildly flavored rainwater, the Burgundy was good. He lit a cigarette and toyed over it, looking about him. It appeared that Jake's Place was one of the recent "discoveries" of the up-town crowd. There were dinner jackets and evening cloaks out there. Teeth flashed in the subdued light and jeweled rings sparkled. These customers were young; the cocktail, late dinner and night-club gang.

Bill saw at once that he had started this evening wrong. He was also

young. Why was he roosting here, on the edge of things, like a hopeful bull-owl blinking at the jungle parade? He knew Seattle. He had been a "big shot" in college days—he grinned at that—an end on a Rose Bowl team, one of the graduates labeled "bound to succeed." Certainly he had lost touch during the past two years, but somewhere in this robust, sprawling city he had dozens of friends.

Dozens? There were scores—hundreds. It was a friendly town. Jack Lanceford, for instance. He'd heard up on the dredges that Jack was getting a crew together for an oil and mineral exploration down in Ecuador. Why hadn't he thought of that before? Jack might have a spot for him. You had to sign up for three years on those South American deals; but what of it? It meant experience, a change of scenery, a stake with which to start out again when he returned to the Northwest. It would clear the mental decks.

He emptied his glass and signaled the waiter. He paid his check and prepared to leave. Get back to the



"You figure I owe you something?" Red asked. "A trifle," Bill admitted. "No rough-stuff," the bartender interposed.

hotel, call Jack, start the wheels moving—that was the program.

Then he saw Rocky coming, and relaxed, shrugging.

Rocky came directly to the alcove and leaned there, twirling his hat on a stubby forefinger. Bill blinked up at him genially. Rocky was all right. Rocky couldn't help the shape he was in—crooked as a pretzel, prowling the barrens like a vulture. But you couldn't get tough with Rocky.

ROCKY'S mood had changed. His hard glance studied Bill and the empty bottle.

"You're swacked," he asserted. "Stiff as a carp."

"Oh, no," Bill denied. "No, indeed. And if so—what of it? Look, Rocky—about that squareface. It's awful. It's dynamite. There ought to be a law—"

"Outside, m'lad." Rocky jerked his thumb toward the door. "Let's see you walk. Two gets five you fall flat on your foolish face."

"Done," said Bill.

He rose up and led the way. Rocky followed, watching him narrowly. "Not bad," he admitted, when they

were outside. "Five it is. Now, five more says you can't walk downhill. You soar like an eagle. I don't hold you up, remember."

"Nonsense," said Bill with dignity.

They came to an alley. Rocky guided Bill in; and Bill, peering about him blandly, knew that he had seen this place before. The farther entrance stood out in silhouette against hidden street-lights. A hidden moon in the east shone on a brick wall at the left. There was a break in the wall, and some sort of junkyard was inside. On the right, towering buildings blotted out the sky. A row of lighted windows blazed up there, on the second floor. Below was the dimly lighted secondhand store that served as a blind for De Silva's.

"Hal!" said Bill, halting. "You're deep, Rocky—deep and devilish sly. But I'm gonna fool you. I'm not going to De Silva's. Different 'rangements. I'm going back to hotel. I'm gonna call old Jack Lanceford—"

"Listen," said Rocky. "There's a guy at De Silva's who wants to see you. He's waiting for you. Name of Red Schafer."

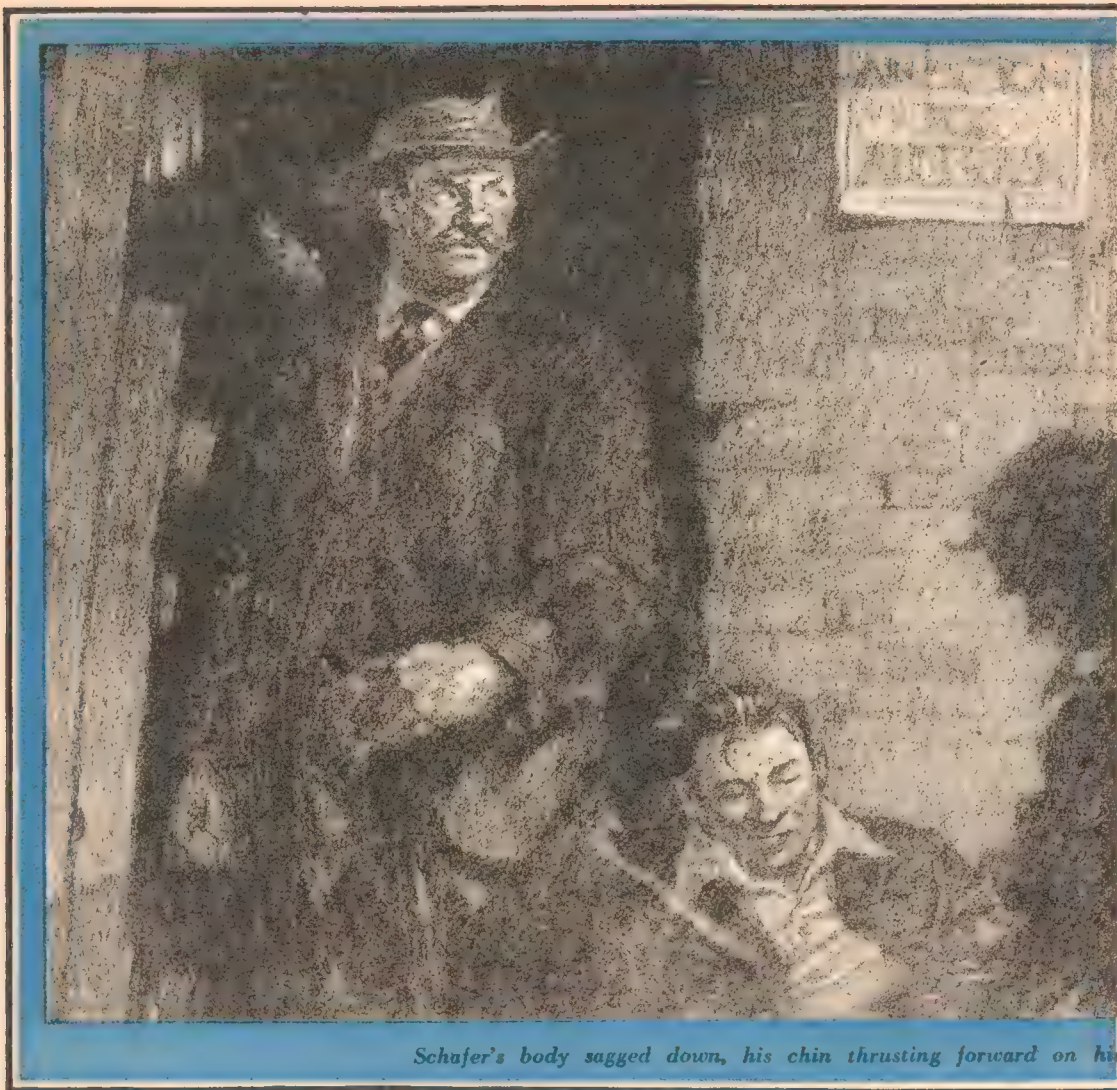
Bill stared at him, blinking. Then he laid hold on Rocky's arm, and was surprised to find Rocky trembling like a bulldog braced against a leash.

"Schafer? Don't you ruin this fine large evening, Rocky."

"Listen, you polluted maverick," said Rocky. It was surprising how tough he could be. "Schafer's looking for you. He heard you was in town. He's just drunk enough to be mean. He's up there making his brag about how he took Hod Kennedy. He's laughing at you, with his mouth full of teeth. D'ye know how much he's got left of that twenty grand he stole from Hod? Less than six. Does that mean anything to you? Or d'ye still feel like throwin' handsprings amongst the Shasta daisies and yodeling at the moon?"

Bill scowled at him, very much annoyed. "Schafer can live his own life, my friend. I'll live mine. D'you know what I think of Schafer?" He snapped his fingers. "The hell with Schafer. Let him fry in his own fat."

"Okay." Rocky tore himself roughly away. "I'll go jump him myself. D'ye think Hod's sleeping sound tonight? He was a friend of mine. You're only his flesh and blood. . . . Roll your hoop elsewhere, son."



Schafer's body sagged down, his chin thrusting forward on his

He strode away, not looking back.

"Wait," said Bill.

Rocky halted at once. Bill overtook him and passed him, heading for the entrance to De Silva's. Rocky trotted alongside. "Yeah?"

"You're right," Bill said. "There's a chore to be done. Funny how it slipped my mind! . . . His mouth's full of teeth, eh?"

"Look," said Rocky. "There's some short lengths of pipe in that junk yonder. Best slip one in your pocket for percentage. He's mean."

"Tut," Bill reproved. "We're gentlemen, Rocky. Just a little discussion. No brawl."

"Gentlemen!" Rocky whispered. "No brawl, he says. . . . I'm a ring-tailed, stalwart son!" Then, seeing Bill's face in the strengthening light, he hunched his shoulders. "Excuse it, please. . . . Better invite him out-

side, Bill. Them barkeeps are bouncers, also. They'll be giving you the eye."

"Tut," Bill said. "Of course. Preserve the amenities—or do you observe 'em? Always defend one's dignity—mustn't one?"

"Always," Rocky agreed, his mustache spreading.

THEY mounted the back stairs, passed the lookout and so through the upper door. It was a glittering den. A vast carpet stretched out in green-and-gold splendor to the chromium-trimmed bar. A larger expanse at the right held the gaming-tables. Many customers milled there, some in evening dress, others roughly garbed. Smoke hung like fog about the soft lights overhead.

Schafer was leaning at the bar, half facing the door: a big man, lazily

alert. He had on a suit of expensive make, but poorly fitting. The coat was too tight about his bulging shoulders, too loose about his lean hips. The open collar of a sport-shirt flared about his massive neck, and the brim of his upturned hat gave an arrogant, flashy touch to his heavy-jawed features.

"Leave seconds for me," Rocky whispered. "You want me to stand by, or fade?"

"Fade," said Bill. Rocky sidled to the right and was gone.

"That's him, Louie," Schafer said. A newly lighted cigarette waggled as he spoke to one of the bullet-headed bartenders leaning near by. "One of these lads who don't know how to play for keeps. You've seen 'em around this joint, squalling." He pulled off his hat as he grinned at Bill. "How you doing, son?"



chest. Bill stood over him, battling the urge to crush and destroy.

Bill halted and did not sway. His reflection in the mirror back of the bar was that of a formidable stranger—the face bloodless, eyes burning, lips smiling a little. He thought: “*Somebody’s unchained a wolf.*”

“I’ve gained heft, Red,” he said. “Thanks for waiting.”

He knew that Red would know what he meant. More than once in his callow boyhood, unknown to Hod Kennedy and before Hod himself had been softened for the kill, he had groveled at this man’s feet, the breath battered from his gangling body, the soul of him wrenched and sick with helpless rage. “You wait, Red Schafer—just you wait! When I grow up—”

“Sure.” Red had always flavored the dish with contempt. “Get some heft, sonny. I’ll wait.”

Red recognized it now for what it was, his grin tightening. “The pay-

off, eh? Spill it, then. Lay it on the line. You figure I owe you something, maybe?”

“A trifle or two,” Bill admitted. “Plus a little interest. You’ve been writing it on the cuff, you know—”

“No rough-stuff, boys,” the bartender interposed. He needed no ringside gong to warn him. “Whatever it is, take it outside.”

“Of course. Sorry.” Bill bowed a little, waving toward the door. “After you, sir.”

“No, indeed,” Schafer returned, winking at Louie. “Proceed, Mr. Kennedy.”

BILL led off, every nerve and fiber aroused and on guard. Mists had cleared away. No jungle path was more dangerous than this narrow stairway, with Red Schafer behind him. . . . But the lookout was

watching from below; he opened the door. “Good night, boys. Come again.” They passed through and down. As they crossed the dimly lit store, Bill was watching their twin reflections in the cobwebbed windows ahead.

He crouched suddenly, shifting his head. Schafer’s fist drove by, with such force behind it that his underarm and body lunged against Bill’s shoulder. Momentarily his arm was extended there, and his clenched fist—hairy, the tendons standing out like iron, the knuckles huge and metallic. Bill grasped that wrist and bowed himself forward and down through the open door.

Schafer’s body described an arc; he crashed in the alley on his shoulder and back. Notwithstanding the shattering impact of it, he rolled on and up in a catlike movement. Bill

stepped down lightly, into the open. "It's a habit with you, Red? I mean—brass knuckles?"

"You asked for it," Schafer returned, between his teeth. "Put a rat like Rocky on my trail, will you—setting the old-timers against me, spreading talk about me stealing your blasted claims!"

"Well?" said Bill. "Who stole them?"

"Last chance, sonny." Schafer lowered his shoulders and braced himself. "Run for it—clean out of town. Or I'll mark you."

"Take off those knuckles, Red. After all, we're white men. Or are we?"

Schafer rushed at once, a bull-like charge. Bill ducked under his flailing right, slashed once and retreated. Schafer's left grazed his temple; another struck his jaw. He scarcely felt it. He was watching Schafer's lethal right. One blow from those brass corrugations would tear flesh from bone. "*My error, Rocky,*" he thought, grimly. "*Where's that short length of pipe?*"

Bill planned his strategy in retreat. Schafer was stalking him now, crouching. In the dim light, the whites of his eyes and his bared teeth glistened. Bill's back was to the wall; and with a muttered, triumphant imprecation, Schafer closed, swinging. Bill ducked almost to his knees and placed his right foot against the wall. Thrusting like a piston, he tackled hard and low, mowing his man down.

He was up at once, in an explosive effort, wrenching himself free from hands that were master of all the foul arts of bone-breaking and gouging. Their positions were now reversed: the alley behind him, the wall behind Schafer. He did not retreat; this was his opening. As Schafer came up, his gorilla arms raising, Bill set himself and swung from the heels.

It had to be good, and it was good: a hay-maker. Schafer's head shot back. He was not out as he fell, but staggered back and down, trying to catch his balance. He failed and crashed. A tier of stone projected from and supported the base of the wall: designed, in some past epoch, to protect wagon-wheels from scraping the brick. The back of Schafer's head struck the projecting edge of granite with a sullen impact. His body sagged down, his chin thrusting forward on his chest. In this position he lay motionless and inert.

Bill stood over him, swaying, battling the most savage of all flaming desires: the urge to crush and destroy utterly. "How about it, Red?" His challenge rang hoarsely through the alley. He stood ready, imagining he could see that dim massive figure bowing forward a little, gathering itself for an upward, clawing leap.

But Schafer made no reply nor movement. Bill stood looking down, his fingers exploring his jaw. The bone was aching, the flesh bruised and moist. He turned away, breathing heavily, and got out his handkerchief to hold against the cut. He paused and looked back, then went on. "*Somebody'll stumble over him,*" he thought. "*Just another bum in an alley.*" He looked at his handkerchief and saw dark stains on it. Better get it taped up right away. No use looking like a tramp when he went back to the hotel.

CHAPTER FOUR

BILL turned into the first drugstore on the avenue and repaired the damage. The druggist suggested a hot pack to reduce the welt on Bill's forehead. Bill applied the pack at the sink in the back room, his head clearing. Late fires cooled slowly in his blood. He decided to go back to the alley. Red might still be unconscious: he'd hit the wall a considerable jolt. The chore was done, such as it was; but it wasn't right to abandon Red there.

He had been gone from the scene of the late battle a matter of minutes. When he turned in to the shadows, he found a number of people, a dozen or more, clustered about the spot where Schafer lay. They formed a circle that was illumined in the center. He joined them, touched by a sudden somber thrill of apprehension.

A policeman was standing by the body, his flashlight tucked under his arm at an angle so that it shone on a notebook in his hand. He was questioning a tall bespectacled man, jotting down the answers. Red Schafer had been shifted a little away from the wall, so that his head rested on the cobblestones. His head was hidden from view, somebody having found his hat and placed it over his face.

"Drunk?" Bill asked the bystander against whom he pressed. He knew better. His knees felt weak.

"Dead as a doornail," the man returned, without looking at him. "Somebody slugged him and left him lay. Listen—"

The bespectacled man was talking nervously. "I'd just come down from—"

"Yeah—De Silva's," said the officer. "This'll padlock that joint. Now just tell it, and don't repeat. . . . You found the body here. You phoned Headquarters. Ever see this fellow before?"

"Yes sir. Just a few minutes ago—when he left with a young fellow, a tall chap—"

"Hal!" said the officer. "What do you remember about this guy he left with? Describe him."

The bespectacled man gulped. "He was tall—"

"Okay, so he was tall. Remember, brother, he's getting farther away by the minute. What color was his hair?"

"Black. And a little curly. A good-looking lad. I noticed him because he walked right up to—to this man—"

"What was he wearing?"

"A leather jacket. And high-topped boots. He wasn't a working-man, though—you could tell that—"

Bill edged away, feeling dizzy and nauseated. It seemed incredible that he could stand there, one of the crowd, and not be recognized. For the moment all were facing in, but if he moved farther away, he would instantly attract attention.

He tried to think, but his thought-processes had bogged down. Police sirens were screaming along the upper avenue; others were turning down toward the alley. There was something about those banshee wails that made his skin crawl. They seemed to shriek: "Hold him—hold him! Don't let him run for it! We're almost there."

Why run for it? Facts were facts. The thing to do was step up and say: "We were fighting. I knocked him down and his head hit—" But wait: he, Bill, had come looking for Schafer. He'd forced the issue, invited Schafer out. The bartenders would swear to that. This bespectacled citizen would swear to it. The least possible charge, under such circumstances—

It was too late now: an ambulance and police-car were swinging into the alley at this end, the patrol wagon and another police car at the other. The alley was blocked. He was trapped.

A hand grasped his arm, and he stiffened. This was it. . . . But it was Rocky Flynn, and Rocky was urging him back, away from the group. "You completely nuts?" he whispered savagely. "I figured you'd shellac him. I never dreamt you'd lay him like a carpet. Why aint you miles away? . . . Easy, now. Not too fast."

Bill held back. "No use, old son. Might as well face it."

There was a stir at the rear. A voice roared after them peremptorily: "Hey, you! Where are you going?" The officer's flashlight glared. "Come back here! Nobody's leaving this alley."

"Easy," Rocky whispered. "Into this junkyard. There's a board fence at the back. A woodyard below. Don't look back—"

"Halt!" barked the officer, aroused and advancing.

"Now!" Rocky hissed.

They dived through the break, and Rocky twisted immediately to the

left, shielding them from possible line of fire. Pounding feet reëchoed; a whistle blasted shrilly. "Watch it!" Rocky warned. "Don't fall! Here's a hole in the fence."

They dived through and down into the protection of long tiers of cordwood. Vivid flame lanced down from the top of the fence. The sound of the explosion reverberated in the night.

But they were already in the clear. A dark tunnel was below, between two shoddy tenements. They plunged through and out into the street. At Rocky's gesture they turned immediately to the right. "Right again," he directed, when they came to the corner. "Just walk casual, smack up past the alley. There'll be crowds there. Them prowlers will be fanning out, looking for us."

It was just that simple. They passed the north end of the alley, through the converging crowds, and mounted up to the avenue. The traffic there was a different, unheeding world; they merged into it like trout in a stream. Bill could feel his heart pounding as they moved with the current. None gave them a second glance. They were two among thousands.

"Hold it," said Rocky, when they came to the first corner. He steered Bill to the curb. "Look, here's a cab." He flung up his arm.

"Cab?" Bill said, his lips trembling. Every muscle in his body seemed to be trembling. "It's only a couple of blocks to the hotel."

Rocky grunted. "Sure—and a dick probably leaning against the desk there, looking for you." The cab slid up alongside. "In with you."

"But my bags! And I left all my money with Sam—"

"Which takes rank," said Rocky, severely, "amongst them completely trivial details. I'm well heeled. First thing in a fire is to get in the clear. You can always buy more furniture. . . . Get in, boy."

Bill got in and sat back, eyes closed. Rocky gave a muttered order to the driver. "And step on it." He got in beside Bill, and the cab shot away.

AFTERWARD, looking back, Bill marveled at how grateful he felt toward Rocky. It proved something or other. At the moment he was too washed out for rational reasoning. He had traveled too fast, too far, during the previous three hours.

He said, wearily: "Where to, now?" "The airport," said Rocky. "We were taking off around midnight, anyway. What you need now is plenty of miles between you and Seattle. So we'll give you a lift to Prince Rupert."

Bill sat up, cringed and relaxed again. "Prince Rupert? What good will that do?"

"Lay low there first," said Rocky. "Sleep it off. Then figure it out. . . . Man, you sure took Schafer! And him wearing brass knuckles!"

Bill shuddered. "Don't! The man's dead, Rocky."

"Good men or bad, they only die once." Rocky was blunt about it. "The world also lost Hod Kennedy."

They were speeding across the flats, heading for Boeing Field. The sky was clear and the moon rode low, paralleling their flight.

Bill leaned forward, burying his face in his hands. "I'd better phone Sam from the airport."

"He's a friend of yours," Rocky objected. "No use putting him on the spot. Those dicks will be pestering him with plenty questions." He shrugged. "Make it snappy, then. Tell him you're at the stage-station, heading south."

They rolled into the vast airport. It was almost deserted at this hour, though, the central administration building and the control-tower above blazed with light. A lone cabin ship waited on the adjacent runway, motor idling: a big ship, low-hung and powerful, an amphibian. Its streamlined pontoons were also equipped with twin landing-wheels.

Bill entered the waiting-room, saw a phone-booth at the right and went directly to it. He barely glanced about him. An attendant dozed in the ticket section. Except for a woman standing beside the door, the big room was deserted. . . .

Sam was aghast. "Good God, boy—where are you? No, don't tell me. Just tell me what happened."

Bill told him.

"There's a detective out at the desk," Sam said. "He called it robbery and murder. It seems Schafer had six thousand on him, cash, when he left De Silva's."

"No!" said Bill, horrified. "Somebody must have rolled him after I left!"

"It looks bad." Sam lowered his voice cautiously. He was speaking close to the mouthpiece. "I wish I could advise you, son. . . . What about your bags? And the cash you left here?"

"Forget the bags," said Bill, sick at heart. "Hold the cash. If I don't come back for it, use it to help somebody that's in a jam. Some moron like me. . . . So long, Sam."

He went outside, looking for Rocky. He had certain blunt questions to ask Rocky. Not that it made much difference now. . . . But Rocky was not alone. He and the woman who had been waiting inside were moving toward the runway, talking together. Rocky was talking; she was listening. She was a young woman, dressed in an outdoor suit of heavy tweeds, woolen stockings and walking shoes

of sturdy British make. A close-fitting turban held her dark curls snugly. She carried herself well, head up.

They heard him coming and turned to wait for him under the light illuminating the sign: PASSENGERS ONLY. Bill saw her face fully, and for an instant was touched by the same panic that had gripped him in the alley, when the police were closing in. Only, this time there was no escape.

HE knew her at once. The years had changed the mold but not the metal since those callow days at Shawnigan. Ruth MacRae was a grown woman now, touched with the poise rooted in breeding and wealth. Yet the same plebeian freckles, bane of her girlhood, bridged her patrician nose. The old copper tints were in her hair. Her long-lashed eyes had the same frank, almost haughty quality that had appealed to him years ago, when they had sprawled like puppies on the Strathcona dock.

"This here's Bill Kennedy, Miss MacRae," Rocky said. Standing a little behind her, he winked commandingly at Bill, a plain warning: "Play 'em as they fall."

She inclined her head a little, looking steadily at Bill. Bill gave her stare for stare, poker-faced. He was thankful for one thing: she didn't remember him. She hadn't even known his surname at Shawnigan. It had just been "Bill" and "Ruth."

She said, with a touch of British accent and in the same impersonal manner with which she might have appraised a horse: "He seems a bit shopworn. And a little blotto, to boot?"

Bill could feel himself flushing. Rocky said quickly: "Sho! Like I told you, I dragged him away from a party. These mining lads get that way in Seattle, sometimes, on a Saturday night. . . . Let's go."

"Rocky," Bill said, "I never liked jokers wild. I think I'll sit out. Thanks."

Rocky congealed on the instant. He dragged out a heavy watch and looked at it meaningly. "Sure it's jokers wild, son. And in a couple of minutes more, some of your friends will be rolling in, ra'r'in' to drag you back to the party."

"Come, come, Mr. Kennedy," said Ruth MacRae. The taut lines in her face softened. "Sorry, and all that. I'm sure you'll be honest and ethical tomorrow, even with a headache. . . . Let's go, by all means."

Bill hesitated, then inclined his head and followed along. Oddly, he recalled that he had hesitated in just that way when Rocky had placed the bottle of squareface on the table, back there at the hotel. But that, too, was a part of the pattern that had sped on into the loom.

The cabin was roomy: four places up forward, including the pilot's, and a large freight-compartment aft. Whitey Bodine stood up at the controls and faced toward them. Rocky introduced Bill, and they shook hands briefly. Whitey was about Bill's age, powerfully built and with hard, shrewd eyes. A tiny straw-colored mustache imparted a touch of cockiness to his bony features.

He said: "You're traveling light, Kennedy. No bags?"

"He's outfitting at Rupert," Rocky said. "I'll tell you about it. Let's go."

"Righto." Whitey settled at the controls, adjusting his safety belt. "Pick your places. Strap 'em on."

Rocky motioned Ruth up forward with Whitey, but she shook her head. "It's my turn with Mr. Kennedy."

Rocky hesitated, gave Bill a meaningful glance and went forward.

The wind was from the north, and the field stretched south from this point. They taxied to the end of the runway, wheeled and turned back. The ship hung on its brakes, quivering, while Whitey gunned it experimentally. Then they moved forward, motor thundering.

Both Rocky and Bill kept their faces glued to the window while the administration building dipped at an angle below them. There was no sudden burst of activity down there, no police-cars skidding to a stop. No signal came from the control-tower, calling them back. They climbed steeply toward the stars, while the glittering city spread out below them and the Olympics across the Sound rose up like awakened giants.

BILL relaxed, eyes closed, his elbow resting on the window-frame, his forehead pressed against his palm. He could feel his temples throbbing. "Rocky rolled Schafer," he thought. "He was there. He couldn't resist it, with his buzzard instincts. He figured it was my money, anyway. . . . But where does that leave Bill Kennedy?"

"Air-sick?" Ruth MacRae asked, her matter-of-fact voice raised above the remote thundering of the motor. "You'll feel better when we've leveled off, I'm quite sure."

"Thanks," Bill said.

She offered a cigarette. "I know," she said, after they were smoking. "Rocky told me he had to talk fast, that you had other plans. I'm no end grateful to you for jogging along with us."

"Quite all right," Bill said.

Her cigarette glowed. It lighted up her face, gave it a rosy hue. Her eyes were luminous and intent. "He's quite a salesman, isn't he?"

"Rocky?" Bill nodded, smiling a little. "Yes. By a coincidence, I was just thinking about that."

THE amphibian made altitude steadily. It had obviously once been an eight-place passenger job; it was both heavy and powerful and rode like a battleship. They seemed to hang suspended, like a gull.

Yet dark clouds of land and the burnished Sound crept steadily by. The twinkling lights of Everett drifted below and past, and the clustered jewels of Anacortes strengthened ahead. They were boring steadily northward—literally north by west—their javelin-like flight only slightly retarded by the head-wind.

Ruth MacRae asked: "Feeling better, Mr. Kennedy?"

"I feel fine," he lied.

It was no accident, he knew, that had placed her opposite him. Rocky and Whitey were up forward, heads together. Bill Kennedy's life-history was probably unfolding there. At intervals Whitey gestured with his cigarette. It appeared—though one could never be sure about Rocky's self-deprecatory moods—that Whitey was naming the play and Rocky was hastening to agree.

Bill glanced at Ruth and saw at once that she was aware of it. A dim light overhead caused the interior of the cabin to be reflected on her window, superimposed upon the dim vista beyond and below. She was watching him there. Whitey was also watching in the rear-view mirror, his blue eyes, under their dust-colored lashes, flicking to the instrument panel and back in a hard, emotionless stare. Even Rocky's ears seemed alert and quivering.

Bill thought, with a species of apathetic grimace: "*Look me over, folks. The specimen's trapped. Just don't place too many bets on how he'll perform.*"

Ruth said, motioning westward: "It's beautiful, isn't it?"

It was beautiful. They were over the San Juans, and the hundred and eighty-odd islands were scattered like fragments of black cloud on a field of silver. Beyond was the dark mass of Vancouver Island, stretching as into infinity northward. The angle at which the moonlight fell caused its vast bulk to seem suspended between earth and sky.

"Look," she said. "D'you see something gleaming there in the hills? It's awfully far away. It's a little lake called Shawnigan."

"Pretty name," Bill agreed. He had already picked it out. Though they were some eighteen air-miles distant, he could almost see the blunt silhouette of Malahat, on the near shore.

She turned to look at him. "You've never been there? You know, I've an odd feeling that we've met before."

"I think not," Bill said, drawing back. This was one angle that must be blocked at once; those callow days at Shawnigan were far in the past.

She studied him a moment, then nodded. "It's of no importance, of course. . . . How well do you know Rocky Flynn?"

"Mostly by hearsay. He knew my father."

"What's his reputation? . . . Or you'd rather not be questioned on that point?"

"I'd rather not. Does it have a bearing?"

She seemed surprised. "Doesn't it?"

"As I understand this job," Bill said, "there's a mine up at Luna Lake. I'm supposed to look at it. If it's good, it's good. If it isn't, it isn't. Where does Rocky's reputation enter the picture?"

"Or yours?"

"Let's clarify that point too," Bill said. He tried not to be too brusque about it. "I didn't want this job, you know. I had other plans."

"I'd gathered that."

"So, if you've any doubts about me, I'll step out at Prince Rupert. Glad to, in fact."

She looked at him steadily; then her cheeks dimpled a little. "The subject seems a bit stiff-necked. . . . I don't mean to antagonize you, Mr. Kennedy. Don't you see that I'm in something of a spot in this business?"

"To the extent of eighty thousand, yes. You may lose it. I don't know how much that means to you, of course."

"Nor care, do we inter?"

"I'm just the referee," Bill said.

Rocky came back. Ruth said, "Sit here," and went past him to settle herself beside Whitey. Bill saw another angle enter the picture, and was astonished at the profound resentment that it stirred in him. Whitey leaned over to talk to her, and placed his hand on her knee. She struck it off and turning away from him, peered steadily out into the night.

Bill looked at Rocky. "Your pal's something of a heel, eh?"

"Whitey? Yeah." Rocky stifled a yawn. "Hang a skirt on a fence-post, and Whitey'd detour a mile just to lean against it. It's one of the crosses I got to bear in this blasted deal."

"How did you get into partnership with him?"

"I wish I knew," Rocky admitted. "We kind of come together, like a burr and a sheep. And I'll swear I don't know which one of us is wearing the wool. . . . Look." He pointed overside. "Quamichan."

"Never mind the view. There's some questions I want to ask you, cold turkey."

"Shoot," Rocky invited.

"You can count me out at Prince Rupert," Bill said. "I don't want any



"This here's Bill Kennedy," Rocky said. "He seems a bit shopworn," said Miss MacRae.

part of Luna Lake. The hell with it! . . . How's that for a starter?"

"Not bad." Rocky seemed unimpressed. "Only Whitey won't like it." "So what?"

"When Whitey gets notions, he's a wolf. I mean—tough." Rocky's eyes were bland. "He might even talk with the Provincial Police."

"And you wouldn't stop him?"

"I can't. He's got too much on me. He's behind me with a sharp stick. I'm behind you." Rocky spread his hands. "That's the picture, Bill."

"You framed me in Seattle."

"I was like the carp that climbed the tree," Rocky admitted. "The dogs was after him. I knew you wouldn't cut my throat."

"Why not?" said Bill, angrily.

"Besides," Rocky said, "I aint unreasonable. I'm paying you five grand for this side-trip."

"Come back to the point," Bill told him. "You decided to rope me in. The squareface was the first round, eh?"

"That's how I figured it in the beginning," Rocky admitted. "But after sizing you up, I was sure you'd wake up hostile, you being one of these lads with principles. So I figured a tangle with Schafer wouldn't do no harm. You'd end up in some sort

of jam, which couldn't help but be useful to me. Never dreamt, of course, you'd go whole hawg and leave the critter toes up."

"You saw the fight?"

Rocky gave Bill a sidelong look. "I might have."

"And after I staggered away, you rolled him—took six thousand off him!"

"Six thousand?"

"Okay," said Bill, enraged anew.

"But suppose I go up to Luna Lake, look that hole over and tell Ruth she's been cold-decked?"

AT once Rocky's half-humorous mask merged into the one that meant business. "Listen," he said. "You claimed a yen to talk turkey. You aint learned yet what I learned years ago—to look facts in the face. A tree's a tree, and a rock's a rock. . . . All Whitey has to do is point his finger at you at Prince Rupert, and them Provincial Police would toss you into the bull-pen before you could say, 'Bless us and save us!' They'd hold you for Seattle. That means hanging. Or a stretch behind bars

that would see you tripping over your beard before you got out. Think that over."

"And just how," Bill retorted, "will playing ball with you two yeggs smooth my way?"

But Rocky, having shot his bolt, settled back in his corner, yawning. "Just put your mind to it. Read 'em as they lay. You'll be completely over your jag by the time we get to Prince Rupert."

"Maybe," Bill said.

He settled back morosely, stretching his legs, trying to find a comfortable posture in the corner formed by the seat-back and the window-frame. He finally made it: his cheek pressed against the cool glass, chin planted on the palm of his hand. Up forward Whitey sat erect, his tense pose suggesting that he too was battling weariness and lack of sleep. The ship almost flew itself, but they were still three hours from Prince Rupert.

Ruth was turned completely away from Whitey, her arm along the back of the seat and her head resting on her arm. She had her turban off, and her dark curls wavered under an invisible air-current pumping down from a tiny air intake above. She seemed relaxed, except that her hand was clenched. Bill was touched by her pose. It was as though her pride

and resolution were armor temporarily laid aside, and she was a child resting there, uneasy and troubled, far from home.

"Yeah," Rocky said. Bill glanced at him and found Rocky studying him sleepily under the lowered brim of his hat. Only one eye was visible, and it twinkled. "Under all this cheerio, what-ho and pip-pip, she's quite a gal, aint she? Life's full of problems."

CHAPTER SIX

BILL was awakened by the popping of his ears and the dwindling thunder of the motor. It was almost dawn, and they were skimming in over sluggish tidewater toward sleeping Prince Rupert. For a moment it seemed that they were too low. Then he remembered: the ship was an amphibian. Water was her element too. Her wheels would be up, her pontoons clear.

Green headlands loomed under low-hanging mist. The rankness of the underbrush that ended like a wall suggested that this was a spongy, dripping, rain-swept world. Yet the sky, this early Sabbath morning, was flawless.

The ship settled down with a soft impact and plowed on, heading directly toward a small moorage that flanked the main docks. Great warehouses loomed there, and above them the town huddled, gray and static. Whitey cut the motor, and they drifted in toward an open slip. Rocky swung down on a pontoon and fended them off, then stepped ashore and guided the ship alongside.

Not a soul was abroad, and not a dog barked in the silent town. Bill helped Ruth over to the slip, and they stood there for a moment, she tucking in her hair, studying her reflection critically in a compact-mirror. Bill yawned. His hearing was partly deadened by the long-sustained thunder of the motor. He had, to his surprise, only a mild headache, though his tongue had the definite feel of dry moss.

Ruth gave him an appraising glance, smoothing the wrinkles in her tweed coat. "You look a trifle ancient this morning."

"I feel it," Bill admitted.

"Don't look at me too closely," she warned. "I know I'm a spectacle. But the pace has been a bit brisk since midnight."

Rocky and Whitey made fast, lashing the ship securely with cross-lines that held the pontoons away from the dock. This chore done, Rocky swung aboard and handed out his bags and Ruth's. Whitey was in sour mood. "Take the tourists up to the jolly hotel," he told Rocky, when the lug-

gage was unloaded. "The hired man's taking a nap."

Rocky said: "What time for breakfast?"

"Make it eleven. I'll have her gassed and checked. We can take off at noon."

Rocky led off at once with his bags and Bill followed with Ruth's. Whitey watched them go, then climbed back into the ship. Bill gathered that he slept in the freight-compartment, swinging a hammock between the stanchions.

It appeared too, that Rocky and Whitey had planned all details of their stop in Prince Rupert. Rocky had wired ahead for rooms. One for Ruth, and a large one, with twin beds, for him and Bill. The sleepy night-clerk was expecting them; they were routed upstairs at once. "See you down in the dining-room at eleven," Rocky told Ruth. "Come ready to travel. You won't need no bags—just your hands in your pockets."

She seemed surprised. "We make the round-trip in one day?"

"We aint using dog-teams," said Rocky. "Three hours up there. Four, five hours at the mine—whatever you need, Bill—then three hours back."

"Will that be long enough for a thorough check?" she asked Bill.

"It ought to be," Bill said. He didn't tell her that it was probable that thirty minutes would be enough. He had a hunch that even taking samples would be a waste of time; it would be a gesture designed to impress a novice.

"Very well," she said. "I'll be ready."

There was a significant angle about the double room, Bill saw: Rocky proposed to have him under guard at all times. It didn't matter. He, Bill, hadn't dozed all the way up from the narrows. He had been thinking it out, facing the future with bitter clarity: facing facts. And as Rocky had said, he had found that a tree was a tree, and a rock was a rock.

The decision was simple and final: he could not go back to Seattle. The alternative was to drop completely out of sight. Out of life, as far as the world that had known Bill Kennedy was concerned. His path, such as it was, whatever meager rewards it offered beyond life itself, lay north. It was an abrupt shift in destiny; in a matter of hours his whole pattern of living had been torn apart. Still, it had been no more abrupt than the passing of Red Schafer. . .

He was up and around before eleven. Rocky roused at once. "Loan me your shaving outfit, Rocky. While I'm sprucing up, get out your map of Luna Lake."

Rocky blinked at him. "Map? There aint any."

"Draw one, then. What's the general location?"

"East of the Finlay. This side of Sifton Pass."

"Hm-m," said Bill. "You picked rough country. Give me a general idea, old son. Show the best trail out afoot."

He had never known mental reactions as swift as Rocky's. One grizzled eyebrow shot up; the other lowered. That quickly, Bill knew, he understood.

"Not bad," Rocky said.

Bill bathed and shaved and came out, feeling better. He had been able to remove the adhesive from his jaw. Except for a deep but partly healed cut there, and a welt almost hidden at the roots of his hair above his forehead, there were no marks of his fatal brawl with Schaler.

Rocky was dressed, and was fashioning a crude map, scowling with concentration. His cheek bulged with an enormous chew. Bill dragged up a chair beside him, and lit a cigarette. Only a shadow of his headache remained. He was ravenously hungry.

Rocky indicated the map: "There you are. It's b'guess and b'gosh, but figures maybe twenty miles to the inch."

"Luna Lake's that small?" It was little more than a dot below the broken, meandering line that marked the crest of the Rockies.

"'Bout a mile and a half long, maybe a half mile wide. Here's what she looks like." Rocky drew it on the margin in larger scale. It was in the rough shape of an arrowhead, lying north and south. "This here prong feeds right out of a glacier—and it's a honey of a glacier, son. The face of it two hundred feet high, and blue, and the slope of it going up like the roof of a barn for maybe three-quarters of a mile. That's still a half-mile from the top. Whitey's altimeter says the lake sets at nine thousand."

Bill repressed a shudder. It was late fall here at tidewater. Up there, winter would be knocking at the door. "The lake's frozen?"

"It wasn't last week. But any day now. No snow yet."

"Any timber?"

"Scrub and willows. Mostly on Glacier Bay." Rocky indicated the right, or east, fork of the lake. "Here's where we usually set down—" He indicated the west fork. "The mine's in between, at the point, right smack in the bottom of the cliff. There's a touch of beach there, and the beach runs around into Glacier Bay. Boy, that lake's deep! No bottom a-tall. Blue by day and black by night."

Bill studied the map. "It doesn't look far to the East Fork." He spanned it. "Sixty miles?"

Rocky nodded. "Just a guess. And what miles! Some up, the rest down."

A mountain goat could do it in a week, I reckon. And he'd know he'd been places. At that, it would be easier than trying the glacier." He sat back and looked hard at Bill. "We talking about the same thing, son?"

"Yes," said Bill grimly. "Part of it."

He got up and paced about the room, puffing on his cigarette. He crushed it in an ash-tray, came back and leaned opposite Rocky.

"I'm laying it on the line, Rocky. It's this—or nothing. If there's any debate, I'll give myself up here. Seattle will pay my way back to the States."

"Yeah?"

"Yes," said Bill.

Rocky appraised him. "You mean it," he decided, at length. "Okay—shoot the works."

Bill stated it bluntly. Ruth MacRae must remain here at Prince Rupert. She had no business flying up into the wilds with two crooks and a murderer. She'd lost her eighty thousand, which was a mere fraction of her means. Only stubbornness and pride were driving her on. He, Bill, would send her a written report on his findings. He would tell her the mine was worthless, but would make no guess as to how much money had gone into the hole, unless the facts justified it. Otherwise, he might go so far as to say that the amount spent was "substantial." . . . That would take care of Ruth MacRae.

"And now," Bill went on, "we come to the detail that takes care of Bill Kennedy. Can I buy a trail outfit here on Sunday?"

"You can't," Rocky said, watching him. "I can."

"That's your chore, then. We take aboard the ship, for me, one sleeping-bag and tarp, grub for thirty days, one .30-.30 carbine, also ammunition. You'll leave me at Luna Lake. In a couple of days you fly back in. What do you find? I've fallen into a crevasse, or drowned in the lake. Maybe there's a hole in the ice and a note in a forked stick. I'm a wanted man, and I'm taking a short cut out, and the hell with it! The point is, the stage is set proving I've cashed in. . . . Got it?"

"Hm-m," Rocky said. He too rose and stood looking at the map, tugging at his mustache. "Then you'll make it to the East Fork—you hope."

"Can it be done?"

"Might be. I seen the snowfields, once, from farther north. They looked drafty. . . . Still, there's a trapper up there below the timberline, on a creek just above the Meadows. The Meadows is a two-bit settlement." Rocky cocked an eyebrow at Bill. "Suppose Whitey won't go for it?"

"If he objects, you'll persuade him."

"Me?"

"Yes," asserted Bill. "You, Rocky. I'm behind you with a sharp stick. Because, if I give myself up, you'll be in the next cell. Why? You'll be wanted in Seattle too. Not only as a material witness, but because you rolled Red Schafer."

Rocky stared at him, and appeared to swell visibly to the eye. His mustache bristled. . . . Then he relaxed, grinning.

"You would get tough with me," he accused. "Using my own poison, at that! . . . Okay, boy. I'm sold. And I'll fetch Whitey around. I'll get your outfit together after breakfast."

He got his bag packed, and they started down.

They went down the hall in silence. Rocky was thinking, his hat pulled low. At the head of the stairs, he said: "That's a tough trail, Bill."

"Shed no tears," Bill said. "Any trail leading away from that alley would have to be tough."

CHAPTER SEVEN

As yet Ruth had not come down, but Whitey was in the otherwise deserted lobby. He was standing at a window which overlooked the docks below and the greenness of the bay beyond; a lean-legged yet bulky figure in a fleece-lined flyer's jacket. He was bare-headed, and his tawny hair shone in the slanting sunlight.

He saw them coming, glanced at the clock above the desk, and motioned them to adjacent leather chairs. They sat down, forming a semicircle at the window, with Rocky in the middle.

Bill and Whitey examined each other with polite but hard-bitten interest. It was their first view of each other in the full light of day. Whitey was freshly-shaved, too. His clear skin would have given him a boyish air except for the bitter lines about his mouth, and a hard, sullen quality in his slightly slanting eyes. They were not blue eyes, but gray, with a pale, albino cast.

That Bill's antipathy was mutual was revealed in Whitey's first words, though they carried a pretence of bluff good humor.

"You've picked a handsome lad, Rocky. That ought to help." He showed white, even teeth briefly. "It's mostly a selling job. But a tough one, Kennedy, with the gal looking for snakes in every bush."

"There'll be no selling," Bill said. "Let's get that straight, right at the beginning. I'll call the shots as I see them, as is."

"So?" Whitey dropped his pretence. "What gives, Mister?"

"Smooth down your hackles, the both of you," Rocky advised. "This is business. There's an angle developed."

Whitey nodded. "I can see that. He's gone soft on us?"

"Hard," Rocky said. "He's picked a hard row for himself. A natural for us." He told Whitey what Bill had stipulated: a light trail-outfit, rifle and grub—and their collusion in reporting his death in the wilds.

Whitey blew a cloud of smoke upward and watched it dissipate toward the beamed ceiling.

"Not bad," he decided. "I've made a note of it. Some day I may have to take a powder myself. . . . There's a joker, though. Is the gal willing? I mean—to stay here at Rupert?"

"I'll do that much selling," Bill said. "I'll try to persuade her."

"It never hurts to try," Whitey agreed, showing his teeth again. "D'ye mind if Rocky and I make a little private medicine?"

He rose without waiting for a reply and motioned Rocky to follow him. They moved across the lobby and leaned together against the cigar counter. Bill eyed them a moment, then got out his notebook and pencil and began to jot down his equipment-list, the bare minimum for thirty days afoot in the winter wilds. Winter would have set in before he could reach the East Fork of the Finlay.

The clothes he was wearing—flannel shirt, leather jacket, whipcords, knee-length moccasins—were durable and protective enough for anything but the most bitter weather. He would need a fleece-lined helmet and snowglasses. He *might* attempt it across the backbone of the Rockies itself. . . . Heavy flannels and extra socks, two extra shirts, a toilet kit, tobacco for hand-made cigarettes. The rifle and sleeping-bag, of course, a tarp, a mess-kit outfit, an emergency kit, a waterproof matchsafe.

The food list was easy: bacon, beans, flapjack flour, coffee, salt. He wouldn't need it all if he went direct to the East Fork. But he might be longer than thirty days. A healthy man, trail-wise, could pack seventy pounds, make time and live in comfort—until the thermometer dropped too low. . . .

He was suddenly overcome by the enormity of the thing that had happened to him. Twelve hours ago—exactly—he had been sitting at Jake's Place, a free and hungry man, eating a T-bone steak, medium rare. He was seated in a steam-heated lobby now, and in a matter of minutes would be eating with the others at a snow-topped table. "Oaumeal and cream," he would tell the waiter. "Ham and two eggs. Buttered toast. A touch of marmalade." Twelve hours hence,

by the clock, he would be sleeping by a lonely fire at Luna Lake.

Whitey and Rocky broke in on his reverie. Rocky grimaced toward the stairway: Ruth was coming down. Bill got up at once, and the three moved slowly toward her. Rocky was in the middle, and the other two towered over him. "It's okay, Kennedy," Whitey said guardedly. "We're all set. Just see that you don't vary the program."

FIVE hours of sleep had transformed Ruth. She used makeup only on her lips, and needed little there, Bill thought. Her cheeks had the natural bloom of health, and she carried herself confidently erect. She was wearing her tweed suit and high-laced boots. Over her arm was slung a heavy coat, reversible, with flaring pockets. It appeared to be almost of ankle length. Though she believed she would be out in the wilds only a matter of hours, she had prepared with British thoroughness for any weather. Her woolen turban, Bill saw now, was so designed that it could be pulled down over her ears as a protection in bitter wind.

She was speaking to the clerk as they came up. "I'll be back tonight—rather late, I imagine. Hold the room for me, please. I've left my bags there." She turned to the others, nodding toward the dining-room. "Beautiful morning, what? Is the ship ready, Mr. Bodine?"

"All set."

"And how are you, Mr. Kennedy?"

"Hungry," said Bill.

She sat at his left at a table for four. The dining-room overlooked the bay and docks, and the brilliant sunlight slanted in through the large windows. The plane was visible down there, floating like a gull. A small group of casual spectators stood near by, studying her sleek lines.

The waiter came and stood by. Ruth said to Bill, obviously in cheerful mood: "Order first, please. Then I won't be ashamed to ask for as much as I want. I'm ravenous."

Bill said, smiling a little: "Oatmeal and cream. Ham and two eggs. Buttered toast—"

"Excellent," she approved. "That's substantial. Duplicate it for me, please—with a spot of marmalade."

Whitey said little while they ate, his colorless glance straying again and again to the waiting ship below. Rocky also was preoccupied, his attention fixed on his plate. Yet Bill knew that both were intent on him and Ruth, studying their reactions, seeking clues in their outlook that might bear on the day's business.

Ruth herself seemed entirely at ease. She discussed the flight up from Seattle, the beauty of the Inland Pas-

sage by moonlight, their impending haul to the mountains. She might have been a tourist hugely pleased at a prospective jaunt off the beaten trails.

"Imagine—from here to almost the top of the Rockies and back in one day! And time for business up there, too. It's quite a lark, isn't it?"

"No," said Bill. "It's all business." They were smoking over their coffee now; the time had come to tell her the changed plan. "I hate this, but it's got to be done." He looked at the others. "Incidentally—why me? You tell her, Rocky."

"Not me," Rocky returned. "It's your idea. Don't you be ashamed of your offspring."

"Tell it fast," Whitey said, looking down toward the ship. "Make it good."

She looked from one to the other. "It sounds a bit mysterious."

"It's just horse-sense," Bill said. "We've decided that you should stay here at Prince Rupert, Miss MacRae. It's too dangerous a flight up there for you, and it isn't necessary. I'll take samples, look the ground over and make you a complete, written report."

There was a momentary silence. She glanced at Whitey and Rocky, then looked steadily at Bill.

"Are you serious, Mr. Kennedy?" He had expected her to be surprised. He was unprepared for the storm-signals that flamed in her cheeks and sparkled in her eyes. "Who are 'we'—the ones who've decided this?"

"All of us. It was my idea, as Rocky said."

"My word! After I consented to flying down to Seattle, to find someone I could trust to help me appraise the mine—" Her head came up. "I'm curious about something, Mr. Kennedy: The theory that it's too dangerous for me to fly up to Luna Lake is silly, of course. You know that. Have you discovered some reason—were you helped to discover it—why I should *not* be on the ground?"

"I'd give you the same report in any event," he said. "If you doubt that, of course, flying up there at all's a waste of time."

"Hold everything," Rocky interposed. He had adopted an air of injured dignity. "You called us crooks, gal, sig it unseen, notwithstandin' that we also lost our shirts in this deal. What's the only chance we got to square ourselves? Get us an expert who'll look it over and call a spade a spade. We've got him. You okayed him. Don't you ask us—"

"Listen to me, Mr. Flynn." Her bearing was resolute, though her voice trembled a little. "I've never called you crooks. I've had my opinion, which I'm entitled to, but I've given you the benefit of the doubt all along.

All I've asked is to see the mine, and have somebody with me—an expert, somebody that's unbiased—"

"Pardon," said Whitey, looking at his watch. He had had time to think, and though outwardly he appeared merely to be amused, Bill saw the tightness about his lips. "Time's on the wing. The answer is no? You still want to go along?"

"I insist on it."

"And if we insist it's too dangerous a trip for a woman, what then?"

"Then I'll remind you," she said, "that you wanted me to fly up there alone, with just you two, and I refused. The danger didn't enter, then. Obviously it's just an excuse now. . . . It's probably best, at that, since Mr. Kennedy has raised the point himself. That was a blow, Mr. Kennedy." She gave Bill a level look, crushed her cigarette in the tray and rose to her feet. "Very well, I'll phone the authorities at once."

A blind man could have known that this was no bluff. Bill caught a glance that passed between Whitey and Rocky.

"Wait," said Whitey, as they all arose. "It was just an idea, Kennedy." His expressionless eyes were fixed on Bill. "You'll withdraw it?"

"Sure he will," Rocky said.

BILL thought fast, caught between two fires. Almost immediately he echoed Rocky's conclusion: why not? Since she insisted, and was aroused on the point, she might as well go along to the lake. There, on the ground, he could tell her the true situation, asking only that she keep the facts hidden—for her own sake—until she was again safe in Prince Rupert. . . . It might be awkward explaining to her why he was remaining at the lake. But that bridge could be crossed when they came to it.

"It's all right," he told her. "My mistake. If you're willing to face the risk, you should see the mine."

"D'you mean that?" she asked.

"Of course."

"Why shouldn't I place it before the authorities, anyway?"

Bill shrugged, playing it out. "Suit yourself. The police wouldn't let you fly up there, you can depend on that."

This stopped her for the moment.

Rocky hastened to make it final. "That's what comes from having 2^d honest man amongst us," he told her. "Bill's so different, you figure he must be a wolf."

"That isn't fair," she returned. "He suggested it."

They paused in the lobby, and Whitey said at once: "Rocky and I'll dash out and pick up the equipment, Kennedy. We'll get old Thiebault to open up his store. It won't take long. You and she wait here for us."

This novel of the Northwest of today continues in the forthcoming May issue.

An engaging story by the author of that classic animal life, "The Last of the Thundering Herd."

by *Bigelow Neal*



Barnyard Blitz

BRUNO, a good one hundred pounds of lazy dog, lay stretched on Pa Bates' sand-pile, basking in the last rays of the setting sun. At intervals, he raised his brown head and surveyed the farmyard, but mostly he napped while the evening breeze sent ripples across the yellow and bronze of his long hair.

But even asleep, the big dog was not at ease. Occasionally all four feet jerked in unison to imply that his dream called forth the best of his speed, or his tail quivered in proof that he dreamed of Min, the trouble-making little terrier who had made a practice of swinging on his tail at every opportunity. And then his great body stiffened, something like a snarl gathered in his shaggy chest, his lips drew back and the sun struck smoldering fire from glittering rows of fangs. This, because of the threat that had hung over the farmyard for

a week. It was a real threat, but one known only to Bruno.

Into this scene of quiet and outward peace, came Min herself—the same Min as of old, still making trouble for other and better people. The little white-and-liver-spotted apple of discord came across the yard dragging what remained of a rayon slip—as late as an hour ago, the pride and exceeding great joy of Ma Bates, but now little more than a rag; the material had degenerated under the terrier's teeth until it would attract neither the comment of a stranger nor the recognition of a friend.

Originally, Min had set her course to pass beyond Bruno's tail, but that was before she saw the tail. Seeing it, she stopped suddenly, dropped the battered slip and gathered her little muscles for a leap. Then things began to happen and continued to happen—until a dust-cloud befogged the course of events.

When pain shot through Bruno from stern to stem, he contracted from both ends toward the middle so violently that he went up in the air and reversed ends before he returned to the ground. Coming back to earth, he continued his revolutionary course in an earnest effort to catch up with the end of his tail. With Min swinging in a wide circle about a foot and a half ahead of his jaws, he revolved until a goodly share of the plume tore loose and sent Min rolling like a white cannonball across the yard.

Unable to see because of his own dust, dizzy from the circular motion and partly blinded by righteous anger, Bruno saw the ruined slip and mistook it for Min. With a snarl, he leaped upon it, his powerful jaws ripping the inoffensive garment into shreds. And, as had happened in the past and might happen in the future, Ma Bates came on the scene just in time to see the closing act of the



Ted sat down beside Bruno and pointed his nose at the moon in sympathy.

drama—an act which did not include Min in its cast of characters.

Ma Bates' buggy had long since passed into history, giving way to the family car, but the buggy-whip still remained and continued to make history every day. On this occasion, it wrote several chapters on Bruno's hide. Returning to his funk-hole on the sandpile, Bruno was a disgusted and humiliated dog. Though conscious of no wrongdoing whatsoever, he had been soundly thrashed. And while he never heard of the argument of cause to effect, any dog could reason that Min was the cause.

FOR a time Bruno had some idea of transferring the licking to Min—if he could find her, which was unlikely.

But in the first place she was too small; she was no larger than Thomas Bates, the family cat. Second, she was a female even if not a lady and Bruno was a gentleman of his kind. There was nothing he could do but to swallow the humiliation and wait patiently until such time as the scales of justice might tip and spill out a portion of her just deserts. Meanwhile he was supperless when the sun went down and very hungry when the moon came up.

But Bruno's loyalty to the farm ran deeper and stronger than any current of temporary misfortune. Min or no Min, punishment or no punishment, the call to duty sounded high above the lower key of humiliation. When the moon ran high and the last light disappeared within the house, Bruno knew that the safety of chickens and ducks and geese in the hen-house, of foolish turkeys nesting or brooding their poults far out in the brush, of sheep and calves in the yards, all had become his responsibility. Then there was the matter of preventing Admiral Jones, the beaver, from leaving his pond to gather Ma Bates' gladioli stalks for dam material and the item of keeping Thomas Bates on the gatepost. Lastly, and his greatest responsibility just now, was the problem of protecting the sheep that refused to go in the barn on warm nights.

Getting up from the sandpile, Bruno stretched and yawned and then sneezed twice. The sneezes did not mean that he was catching cold. Like all dogs, he sneezed when he was self-conscious and he sneezed to punctuate the end of any idea that might be chasing around in his head. The double sneeze meant that he had made up his mind. After that he shook himself violently and set out for the hen-house.

Occasionally when Pa Bates forgot to close the hen-hole in the chicken-house door, mink came from the creek to do havoc among the flocks. Or a skunk might come from the hills in

search of supper. Or a weasel might come from the rock-pile on an equally deadly mission. In this case it proved to be a small edition of a weasel.

Now while Bruno associated much with natural history, he was not an academic student of the science. Had he been so, he would have recognized the weasel as a "least weasel"—and a least weasel is the least of a weasel it is possible to produce: a little fellow about four inches long when fully grown, a great killer of mice, but harmless otherwise. To Bruno, however, a weasel was a thing that smelled like a weasel—and the size was a matter of no importance. Accordingly, Bruno lunged forward.

Because of his skidding at the corners, they went around the hen-house twice before the dog came within biting range of the little weasel's tail. And then, just as the great jaws were about to close, the weasel seemed to flicker like a static spark, discharging through a knothole in the building. Bruno was quick enough to thrust his nose squarely into the knothole but not quick enough to pull it out or to stop at the same time. When the nose of a dog weighing a hundred pounds is stopped suddenly, something is bound to happen. For a period Bruno rolled over and over, legs and tail and ears flapping wildly in the moonlight. When he slowed down, he got to his feet, so busy licking his nose that he forgot to shake himself.

At this stage, still a bit groggy, the old dog heard a muffled yelping coming from the direction of the garden. To a man it would have sounded like a three-cornered cross between the croak of a frog, the shrilling of a cricket and a far-distant choir composed of very small pigs. To Bruno it meant that Min rode hard on the tail of another adventure, and wanted help. But he had learned his lessons, many of them, in a different school. With a fine disregard of the racket, he ambled to a favorite position on the shore of the pond where he could see the moon twice at once. There he sat down, pointed his sore nose at the upper moon and began to sing softly.

Halfway through the first verse, he noted a small white dog approaching from his rear quarter. He broke off the song, got up hastily and sat down again carefully, this time on his tail. But it proved a false alarm, for the little dog coming to sit beside him was Ted. While Ted was almost, a replica of Min, except that his small tail waved proudly, whereas Min's had been pinched off in the screen door, Ted was the owner of a different disposition. Ted was Bruno's comrade-in-arms. He was a sympathetic and loyal friend. He possessed a fine tenor voice. While as a warrior, he lacked something both in

weight and killing power, his courage ran strong and true, especially from his favorite position in times of danger—under the arch of Bruno's forelegs and chest.

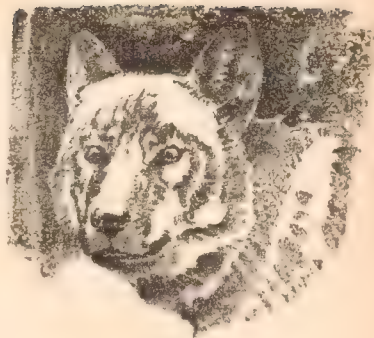
Coming out of the night, Ted sat down beside Bruno. Filled with commiseration, he also pointed his nose at the moon and his sympathy bubbled over in a series of noises high, low and long-drawn but otherwise beyond description.

Bruno had been sad on his own account but now listening to himself and Ted also, his soul sank deep in the mire of despondency. Letting go a long-drawn moan like the cry of a soul in eternal torment, he ran out of breath.

With a fresh intake of air, he drew something more potent than a new charge through his carburetor. Instantly a change came over him. He rose to his feet, the sadness in his eyes changing to a dangerous glitter. The hair on his neck and shoulders stood erect. The moan changed to a snarl and his long fangs flashed in the moonlight, as he began to advance slowly toward the door of the sheep-shed.

At the sudden change in sentiment, Ted knew beyond a doubt that his big partner had scented something far more potent than weasel or mink or even coyote. When the big dog stopped by the door of the sheep-shed and snarled more savagely than ever, Ted took up his customary position between Bruno's front legs and made the snarling double-barreled, although he hadn't the slightest idea why or at whom he snarled.

THROUGH the long hours until dawn, the two dogs maintained almost the same position, although Bruno crouched frequently, baring his fangs as if making ready to charge, and Ted occasionally lost interest and took a nap. Obviously, there was something out on the prairie that was a real threat to Pa Bates' livestock. But Ted had never heard of a buffalo wolf; he did not catch the scent and



he would not have recognized it even if he had. . . .

At daylight nothing had materialized. As the curtain of night retreated and showed the prairie devoid of life, Bruno gradually relaxed and finally turned his attention back to the garden, whence at intervals had come the puppyish yelps and gurglings of Min.

With real danger momentarily averted, Bruno's curiosity finally got the upper hand. Trotting across to the garden and crawling through the fence with Ted at his heels, he stopped to survey the carrot patch—and truly it was a sight.

A pocket gopher had moved in, busily engaged in running tunnels down the carrot rows that cut each carrot in turn just below the crown. Evidently, Min had come on the scene while the gopher threw dirt from his mound. Beginning there, with every show of enthusiasm, Min had enlarged the gopher's excavation, mining out all that was left of the carrots in that row and burying a fair share of the rows on either side. All in all, the night's work had produced astonishing results among the carrots and no inconvenience to the gopher at all.

As Bruno appeared, Min discreetly withdrew, fading away in a clump of ragweed with the air of a small dog on really important business. Bruno sniffed at the situation from several angles, finally coming to the end of the trench and running his nose into the gopher hole clear to and beyond his eyes. There, inhaling deeply and expelling violent gusts of air into the hole, he was in no condition to hear—but in an excellent position to feel, when Pa Bates' boot landed in about the place one would expect it to land under the circumstances.

Following the boot came a volley of well-timed and well-directed blows from Pa's favorite instrument of punishment, a last year's ragweed, big enough to sound bad, and feel worse. After that came imprisonment on the front porch for an indefinite period and a further total loss of food—unless a bowl of skimmed milk might pass for three meals a day. . . .



Throughout the forenoon Bruno slept. Later, he began to take some interest in the yard. Moodily he watched a Wyandotte hen and her brood, and saw Thomas Bates sitting boldly in the yard, washing his face. Min was active as usual, dragging old overshoes this way and that, sniffing at cracks in the granary, and madly wagging her stub of a tail every time Ma Bates crossed the yard and called her a "brave little doggie," and other expressions disgusting to Bruno.

Just outside the screen door, curled disconsolately on the top step, lay the ever-loyal Ted, whining at each movement of the prisoner, and snarling at each appearance of Min. Throughout the day Ted had stuck to his post of sympathy, even refusing to accept battle when Thomas Bates came to the foot of the steps and made insulting faces at him.

EVENING came, but it brought no change; even the bowl was refilled with more skimmed milk.

Once, indeed, at just about sundown, Bruno forced his nose past the screen door for one good smell of freedom, and encountered the warm pink tongue of Ted with a message of sympathy and a reminder that the adventure of the knothole had left his nose in no condition for using as a pry. Later, he was freed long enough to go after the cows, but was returned to prison the moment that chore was done.

With the last of daylight, he saw Pa Bates go to the garden with a bundle of gopher-traps; then darkness shut down to await the rising of the moon. Finally Bruno curled up as close as he could get to Ted, and Ted went to sleep as near Bruno as the door would permit. The sounds in the yard quieted down, the lights went out and the moon came up.

Suddenly Bruno raised his head. Again the night air carried the scent of the wolf. There was no mistaking it; even Ted roused to lean against the

door and whine shiveringly. Bruno began pacing back and forth, sniffing, with his ears cocked forward to sift every sound coming out of the night. When Pa Bates' union suit appeared at the door, and a volley of uncomplimentary remarks disturbed the night and sent Ted pattering for safety, Bruno lay down and wrapped his tail around his nose. But when the door had shut, he came alert again, trembling in every limb, his fangs bared, his breath coming and going in rasping blasts.

Then, a new sound: The frightened bleat of a lamb from the barnyard, followed by the thudding of bodies against the barn. The sound disturbed no one within the house, but it brought Bruno to his feet with a bound, and sent his full weight crashing against the screen door. The lock broke in pieces and spattered across the yard. The door flew open, sweeping Ted from his perch, and banging back against the wall. Fresh reprimands issued from the house, with a promise of dire punishment on the morrow.

But Bruno heard nothing of this, and cared less. His muscles, cramped from disuse, were driving him like an avenging angel through the night.

Close behind, Ted labored mightily. His ability to negotiate small holes and to slide under, partly offset his lack of wheel base. Where the larger dog was forced to detour twice, Ted took the short cuts and came under the last fence just in time to duck under Bruno's front legs, and let loose a volley of defiance with such ferocity that the recoil drove him back under Bruno's tail.

A good section of Pa Bates' pure-blood sheep were piled in a corner between the fence and the barn—those on top half dead from fright, and those at the bottom of the pile in a fair state of suffocation. One lamb lay in the middle of the yard, kicking feebly in a pool of blood. And just beyond stood the most formidable crea-

ture Ted had ever seen; a buffalo wolf. A full hundred and twenty-five pounds of living menace, in a furry armor of gray and bronze that glistened in the moonlight like a copper-rimmed snow-bank.

He was taller and longer than Bruno. His cruel beauty was unencumbered with a trace of fat; his pointed ears seemed a menace in themselves, his mouth was filled with terrifying fangs, the hair of his bronze mane flamed along his shoulders.

All of these things raised a doubt in Ted's mind whether his position under Bruno's tail was far enough from the enemy. But the heart in the small dog beat strong and true. He advanced again until his nose appeared between Bruno's knees. From then on Bruno would fight as necessity dictated. Ted would fight as opportunity offered, being reasonably cautious that opportunity did not open too wide the doors of personal danger.

As between the major antagonists, Bruno was the lighter, and a part of him was useless fat, while the wolf was built of steely muscles that never tired. The fangs of the wolf were like gleaming lances, while those of Bruno were heavier, shorter, not so sharp. Then too, the advantage of speed was with the wolf.

To offset these items, Bruno had fought many battles where the odds were against him. In the course of a long career as a belligerent defender of his master's property, he had met everything from daring weasels to raging bulls, and had developed the gift of using his head first, and his fangs afterward. Certainly he had need of coolness now.

Across the body of the dying lamb, the antagonists glared at each other, the wolf with eyes like opaque pools of milk, and the dog with his usually mild brown eyes now half shut in the throes of calculation. The tails of both animals were rigidly horizontal. From the wolf came snarls that nearly shook Ted off his feet, but which produced only a deep rumble from the chest of the defending dog.

THE battle opened when Bruno appeared to retreat. A closer observer than the wolf, however, would have noticed that the retirement affected only the old dog's forequarters. Behind, his feet broadened as the claws bit into the ground; his flanks bulged as the great muscles contracted. He seemed to shrink into himself, and now his shoulders appeared to sag and his head lowered and turned half over, his teeth dripping as if some phosphorescent substance ran in streams from his mouth.

The first effect of this maneuver was to squeeze Ted from his vantage-point. Hastily the little dog retired to the end of Bruno's tail. The second ef-



fect was to create overconfidence on the part of the wolf.

Suddenly the gray killer launched himself in a wide high arc, to drop on the quailing dog.

BUT Bruno had expected nothing else. As the wolf left the ground, every muscle in the dog's powerful body sprang into play. He also left the ground, but his aim was much lower. Coming up under the wolf, he drove for the killer's throat and nearly scored a fatal hold at the onset. But the timing lacked slightly in perfection; his jaws closed only on the skin; the wolf tripped in the air and turned over to come down flat on his back, his throat and jaws red from his own blood, though from only a superficial wound.

His fall was eased by the fact that he landed squarely on Ted, and his unintentional ally, with a startled squeak, wriggled from under, retired to the fence, and pointed his small nose straight up. There he loosed a new series of barks, each so charged with enthusiasm that it lifted him clear of the ground and turned him halfway around—one way or the other.

Again the wolf charged, and again the antagonists met in midair. This time the wolf, profiting by his lesson, came lower. Bruno could not get under, and the round ended in a stalemate. Then came a dozen charges in rapid succession, and now blood dripped from the noses of both antagonists. So far, the speed and weight of the wolf had saved him from destruction, while the cool defense and great strength of Bruno had warded off any serious result. Nevertheless, Bruno showed signs of the struggle; his fat had proved a decided hindrance and his breath came in gasps.

Seemingly the old dog realized his disadvantage. He changed his tactics and dodged each assault in an attempt to regain his wind, but the attacks came one on the heels of the other, offering no opportunity for rest. At



that, his superior brain came into play again. Without warning, he launched a sudden and savage counterattack which resulted in ripping open the wolf's hide nearly from shoulder to hip. Following it up, Bruno dived again for the shaggy throat—missed it, but felt bone between his teeth.

Under the tremendous pressure of the old dog's strong jaws, the buffalo wolf's foreleg snapped like a pipestem; and now Bruno might have been the victor, but the last assault had burned out his lungs. When his three-legged antagonist threw discretion to the winds and dived for Bruno's throat, the dog's legs responded but feebly to his call.

In spite of all that he could do, he went over backward and down. The deadly fangs reached for his unprotected throat. Now there could be but one end to the fight—Bruno had apparently fought his last battle for his master.

Then something happened that none might have foreseen. For the first time, Ted saw an opportunity compatible with a degree of safety. He came from the shadow of the fence, a white streak of concentrated fury. His small jaws, taking their tactics from Min, opened and closed in the plume of the wolf's tail. Leaping with all his strength to one side, he tripped, fell, and rolled over and over. But his jaws were set to hold, and hold they did. No animal enjoys having his tail

twisted, and Ted, spinning along the ground, nearly tied a knot in that of the killer. Neither can a three-legged animal stand a sudden pull from the side, and the marauder's teeth clicked shut harmlessly, just short of Bruno's throat.

Not knowing what had happened, Ted shut his eyes and tugged backward with all his strength. Realizing a new advantage, Bruno got to his feet, lunged forward, and caught the one good foreleg of the wolf. At that the killer crumpled, and when a burst of crimson flame leaped from the fence and Pa Bates climbed into the arena carrying the smoking shotgun, the buffalo wolf lay dead.

The master knelt in the yard and examined both dogs. Bruno's nose and head showed signs of hard usage, but no wounds worth considering. Ted had chewed a small section from his own tongue. As Pa Bates petted them and said things fully as foolish as anything Ma ever had said to Min, both dogs let their tongues hang out, and panted.

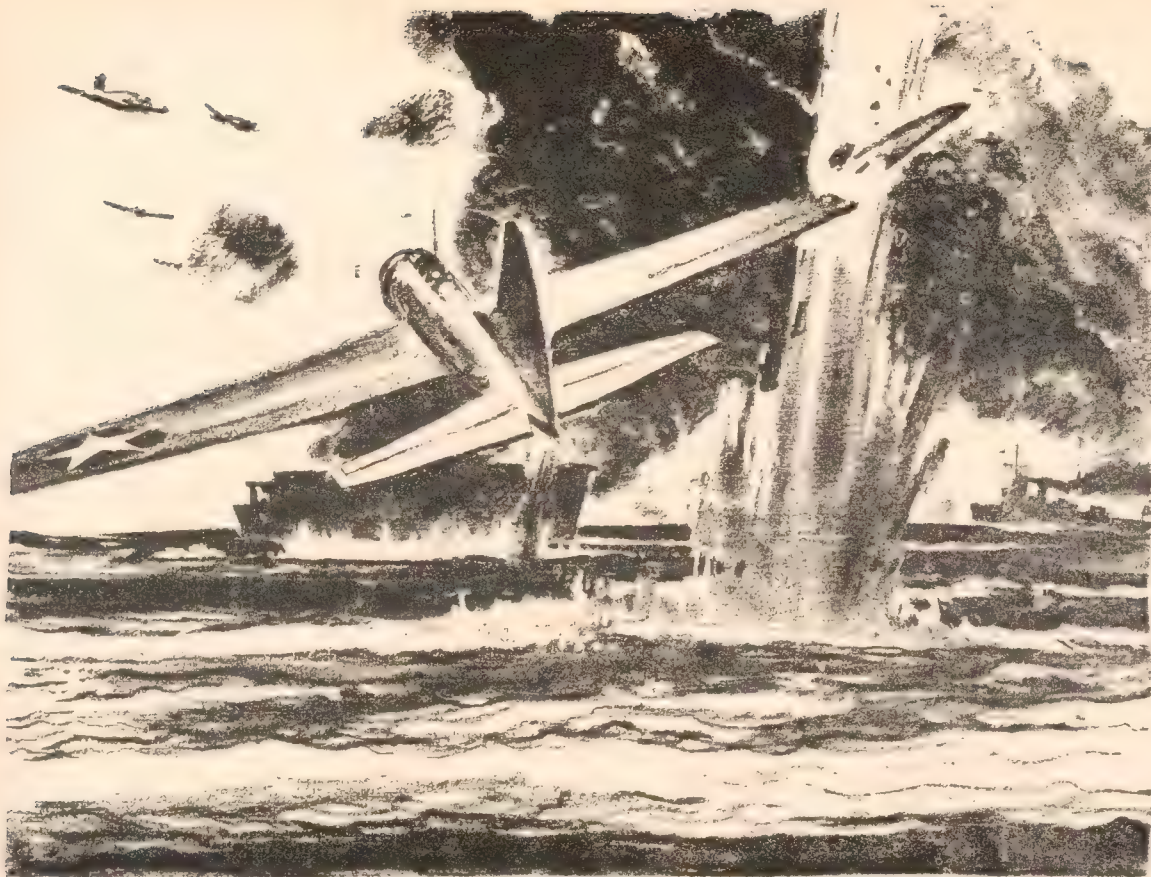
AS they approached the house, Pa Bates with the great wolf across his shoulder, Ma Bates came to meet them; then the scales of justice tipped the rest of the way and spilled liberally of their contents—for around the corner of the house came Min, at the most inopportune time imaginable for her.

She came with a cornerwise gait, because a chain dragged under her feet, and with a series of squeaks, muffled by a gopher-trap clamped squarely across her overinquisitive nose. Fate had brought her on the scene to convict her as the heedless destroyer of the carrots.

Later, when Bruno and Ted had eaten all they could hold, they lay back of the house, listening to music from the granary: It was Min, at last shut up in disgrace. Bruno looked at Ted and Ted looked at Bruno. They let their tongues hang out to smile in the only way they knew. Then they fell asleep in the warm sunshine.



Another of Bigelow Neal's characteristic stories will appear in an early issue.



Torpedo Attack

NO matter how often you come back," Ensign Claymore grumbled to himself down in the ready-room, "you always have to go again."

He snapped the catch of his lighter and applied the flame to the fourth pill in fifteen minutes. The gleam from the wick brought out the remoteness of his expression.

Lieut.-Commander Jiggs Glade was distributing mimeographed copies of their attack plans. Against the wall the teletype provided a castanet accompaniment for the letters that danced across the ground-glass screen above.

The other men in the ready-room were jotting down the stringy patter of flight-data chalked up on a blackboard, trying to keep pace with the message tap-dancing across the screen. The group was made up of more than a score of faces. Most of them were taut and stormy-eyed, a combination of fledgling excitement and sober resoluteness.

Pinky Claymore remembered the last time he had sat in a ready-room awaiting the call: "Pilots, man your planes!"

That was five months ago. Five months to the very day, and he was still an ensign. Five months ago he had scrambled up the ladder to the flight-deck with the encouraging slap of Lieut.-Commander Hayes' heavy paw across his shoulder. Skipper Hayes had barked on the way up: "Whatever happens, Pinky, you stay with me. I'll see you get back, kid!"

Proof positive again that you shouldn't make friends in a war. It's dumb, because you're always trying something screwy in an attempt to prove your friendship. The Skipper was torched that day before they were anywhere near the Jap warship. A Zero picked him off and put a burst of tracer into his port wing-tank, and Hayes made no attempt to scramble out. Claymore wanted to turn back and see what happened when Hayes hit the drink; but they were at tor-

pedo-attack level, and you can't turn in formation and hope to keep your wing-tip out of the water.

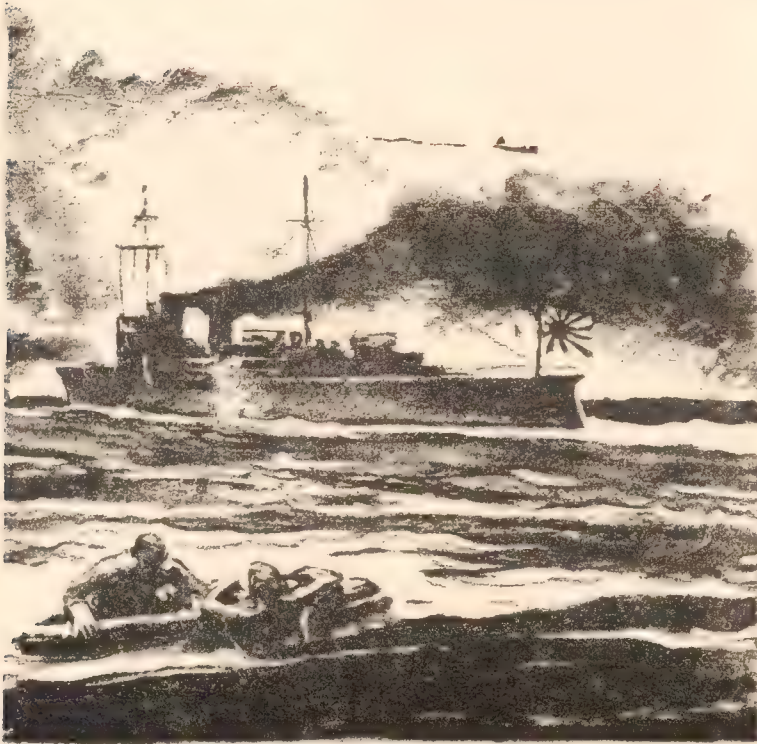
Now Glade was talking there in the ready-room—saying exactly the same things the other Skipper had said.

"This will be the first time for many of you," Lieut.-Commander Glade was going on with a string of carefully honed words. "I haven't had much time to give you, but I've done the best I can. This may be a tough mission—if we find them. But no matter what happens, I want someone to put at least one pickle into that carrier. That's my final order—at least one in there. Good luck!"

The teletype cackled in derision, and Claymore glanced up at the screen. He caught the last of the message and sensed what Glade was referring to.

"E-N-E-M-Y C-A-R-R-I-E-R F-O-R-C-E N-O-W W-I-T-H-I-N S-T-R-I-K-I-N-G D-I-S-T-A-N-C-E. . . . T-I-M-E, 13-0-0."

"Happy landings, guys!" Hayes had shouted while he gathered up his fly-



by Arch Whitehouse

Illustrated by Grattan Condon

ing-gear. He'd winked confidently and raised one eyebrow as much as to say: "Is that tellin' 'em, Pinky? How'm I doin'?"

But *this* Skipper was doing exactly the same thing. Glade was winking at Pinky. He'd given Claymore a section to lead. That was the most he'd got out of that mess of five months before. Pinky was still an ensign, and there wasn't any Distinguished Flying Cross ribbon under his wings. Claymore guessed you had to go all the way to Tokyo to get a D.F.C.

He erased the nervous smile from his face when Glade came along and said: "You must be getting a kick out of this, Pinky." Claymore had no answer for that. His mind wasn't equipped at present to deal with subtleties.

"How do you feel, Pinky?" Glade asked as they wound their way along the passageway to the ladder. "You don't mind going, do you, kid? I mean, just getting back—and all that?"

"I'm all right," Claymore managed. He wondered if Glade knew exactly what "all that" meant. . . .

He'd been over all that so many times with the newspapermen. He'd recited it again and again on the radio to boost the Crossley rating of word-weary news-commentators, who had described the battle as a Midway in miniature. All that had been told at the Men's Club at Eastridge between a pat of salty ice-cream and a factory quartet that had attempted a gutting spiritual. The Rotary Club had given him a luncheon and a wrist-watch for telling it. Someone had compared him to Ensign Gay and talked about the Midway battle again.

By the time he reached New York, he had it down pat, even to the laugh about Mickey Halford, who used to give imitations of Red Skelton comics over his radio while they were making circuits to come in. He'd told all that in Savannah, Toledo, Princeton and even at a place called Buffer's Landing. There was always another

close relative of someone somewhere who wanted to know just what had happened. Ten planes going west can leave a lot of curious relatives who desire the last possible drag out of the details. Twenty officers and enlisted men had taken off to get that Jap squadron, and only Pinky Claymore had returned—aboard a rubber raft.

There was all that, and the pictures taken in front of wall-maps, holding classroom globes and pointing dumbly at charts to show where all that took place.

It always ended up the same way, too: "You sure were lucky! How do you account for it? I mean to say, even your own radioman got it; but you got down and were saved!"

In Pittsburgh a brother of a young radioman-gunner even questioned accusingly how one man out of twenty could get away safely.

"Did you go all the way in with them, Mister?" he had asked. "I mean, did you actually attack her with *your* torpedo?" The man had said that with a quarrelsome glint in his eye, and he had cocked one thumb as though under the impression that a torpedo was fired from a derringer.

Pinky wanted to bust him in the jaw, but he just said: "No. We got it just before I was within range. Our engine broke up, and we just went down." I can't remember whether I discharged my torpedo or not."

SO many points to explain, and now he was back with a torpedo squadron and going out again! The bull-horn topside was bellowing, and the loud-speaker was chanting orders while men hampered with flying-gear and parachute harness that made them walk with a rump-hitching stride, clunked across the island deck and stepped high over the water-tight door-frame.

"I wanted you to get a little more time in," Glade was saying. "Funny how we never seemed to get you on deck when there was a chance to do a routine. But I want you to take over No. 2 section, because you've had experience."

Claymore blinked in the glare that spattered off the wings and cowlings of the fighters and torpedo-bombers out there on the deck. He wriggled against the strain of his own misgivings, and agreed silently that he had had experience.

Five months before in that other show he'd had the experience of taking off from another carrier with nine other planes. The rest of the experience was a fantastic nightmare indelibly imprinted on his soul by the repeated demands for the details. He wondered again if he had always told

it right. That is, had he ever added a few Zeros to the opposition, or in any way disclosed the biting fear that had clutched him with the cold tenacity of a pair of ice-tongs? He wondered again whether he had told how Gillies and Honkie Walder had come together when Hayes was making that first feint attack. They'd never even had a chance to go in to glory—cold.

"It must have been a terrible experience," Mayo Knowlton had persisted that early evening in the Rainbow Room when they sat staring out across the blocked-up panorama of Manhattan. Mayo had worn a tiara of gardenias which held her bronze hair back from her creamy forehead. She had worn an orange dinner dress with simple costume jewelry at the corners of the square neck. He could still see that dress, and the saucy way the pleats were directed upward for the allure business. It was Mayo, and all she meant to him, that had first raised the question concerning his ever going again.

"I've got to put on five pounds," he explained with false enthusiasm. "Only five more pounds, and they'll let me go back!"

Twenty hours on a raft floating about there in the Pacific had taken nearly all he had. He'd lost twenty-five pounds by the time they had him

convalescing in the naval hospital in San Diego.

She had placed her fingertips with a caressing touch on his wings, and leaned forward so that he caught the perfume of her hair and the warm affection of her breath.

"But, darling!" Mayo had remonstrated. "They shouldn't send you back again. There must be many others to take your place now. You can do so much good work here for morale—and recruiting. Don't they have people like you give talks and encourage others to enlist? I mean to say, you have such a marvelous story!" She caught his pathetic smile, and wondered if he felt she was acting childish. She tried to buttress her fears and prove worthy of her place with: "But of course they will want you for leadership."

Leadership, with but one ring of braid on his sleeve! That was a laugh now. He was still an ensign, and the nearest he had come to leadership was his being burdened with a front position in No. 2 section.

"If I can just pack on five more pounds," he repeated, to avoid explaining the leadership business, "they'll pass me for active duty again. I've got to go back!"

If he hadn't met Mayo Knowlton that night at the old Whitelaw Reid

mansion on Madison Avenue, where they were staging the Junior Officers' Ball, the question of his going back might never have taken on such terrifying importance. But it had, and now he was standing wide-legged against the flood of uncompromising light on the flight-deck. The bullhorn was bellowing again, and the ship's whistle screeched as the carrier swung into the wind.

"Baby, I'm sticking close to you!" little Packey MacInnes was yelling at him. "Any guy who can do one pickle show and be the only one to get back, will find me right behind his elevator all the way there and back."

"This'll be a joy-ride, Packey! We have fighter escort *this* time," he said with mock assurance.

"Sure! We got fighters. Those guys will go off rat-racing the minute they spot trouble. They're just out here for the movies. I wonder—"

The bang and clatter of starting engines drowned the rest out. The plane-handlers in their bright blue jerseys were hurriedly swinging the deep-bellied fighters out for take-off position. The flight-deck officer was flagging them off from the safety of the catwalk position.

CLAYMORE tightened his belt another notch and remembered the trouble he'd had getting that five pounds back on. Actually, it had been something less than four, and the flight surgeon at San Diego hadn't liked it a bit. "You're not ready, you know, Claymore," he had said, twirling his stethoscope in the correct movie manner. "You shouldn't be going back yet."

"But I feel all right, sir," Pinky had protested, a thick coating of furry fear impeding his speech. "Besides, I can rest plenty on the way out."

"I'm recommending that you do a stretch as navigation officer. That'll give you a chance to catch up," the flight surgeon announced with the air of a patronizing jurist. . . . "We don't throw off experiences like yours too fast, you know."

"But that was five months ago, sir! I've had a long stretch ashore since then," Claymore heard himself remonstrating. He wondered who the stranger was he was staring at in the mirror on the wall in the dressing-room.

"I think we know best," the flight surgeon decided with a flourish over his medical pad.

But there wasn't much rest, flying out to Pearl Harbor. Every mile was a spine-tingling measure of anxiety. Flying-men seldom make good air passengers. There's a tormenting repressed desire to charge up front and take over. Claymore worried about the navigation, and had his fingernails down to the point where he no



"They shouldn't send you back," Mayo had remonstrated. "But they will want you for leadership."

longer could get his teeth into them. By the time they were circling Diamond Head, his cheeks were drawn. His Navy whites were crumpled and murky from the oil-filmed passenger quarters of the four-engined flying boat. The rest of the trip was completed aboard a destroyer, where the rest of his hard-earned four pounds was thumped off long before they made contact with the carrier off the Phoenix group.

PACKEY MACINNES was irrepressible. He was a small youth with funny legs. His radioman once said Packey looked like a guy who had spent too many hours in a conga line. He had swivel hips and a twist to his right knee, and he presented an expression reflecting the toe-tingling tunes that were continually barrel-rolling through his head.

"Look, Claymore," he bubbled now through the tangle of his helmet gear. "I got a bet on with Monohan of No. 3. I bet him a can of metal-polish that No. 2 puts more torps in than his crowd. Wanner come in on it?"

"Metal-polish?"

"Sure! You know—metal-polish to shine up the medals we ought to get when we come back. Now don't let me down, will you?"

"You make the most of the dog-tag you got on your wrist," Claymore replied with a tinge of bitterness.

"Sure we'll get medals! How can we miss?" grinned Packey. "The Order of the Wartless Pickle!"

"Look out you don't get fisherman's luck."

They'd told Ensign Claymore he'd be cited and recommended for a medal when they picked him up that morning after the other scrap. Someone was always talking about medals—or promotion. All he got out of it was a wrist-watch from a Rotary Club, and a bid to a dance where he met Mayo Knowlton. They could have given him his lieutenantcy and jacked his pay to thirty-six hundred. That would have brought Mayo closer. . . .

The frenzied kick-over of propellers, the ranting of the bull-horn and the thump of the fighters charging down the flight-deck shook Pinky out of his depressing reverie. The talker on the bridge was bellowing apoplectic orders again while the half-circle of putty-colored faces of the arrestergear crew stared at him depreciatively.

"Man your plane, Claymore!"

Pinky stared about uncertainly and then realized he was alone. He hurried through the jigsaw puzzle of wing-tips and whirling propellers until he caught sight of an Avenger that had no pilot. His plane captain was standing on the wing-root, huddled against the slip-stream that tormented off Glade's torpedo-bomber.



"I want someone to put at least one pickle into that carrier. That's my final order," said Lieut.-Commander Glade.

Claymore signed the yellow acceptance-sheet, handed it over and tried to make himself comfortable. He hitched his belt, adjusted the seat for height, and glanced hurriedly over the spatter of instrument dials.

The other crews were reporting through to Glade when he jacked his helmet head-set in.

"How about it, Claymore? All set?"

"No. 2 ready!"

Denning, his radioman-gunner, was singing in the back seat. Something about apple trees being out of bounds for a certain young lady unless she was suitably accompanied by said Mr. Denning. The plane-handlers were at the wing-tips awaiting their turn to swing the Avenger out into position.

"No. 1 section away!"

Glade led his pack down the white guide-line that split the black teak deck. His motor thundered a salvo of exhaust off the metal walls of the island superstructure, raced on and snipped off the steam posy blossoming from the flush-deck indicator nozzle. The torpedo-gorged Avenger dipped dangerously, once she cleared the lip, but Glade held her steady until she had picked up enough speed

to make a normal climbing turn. The sunshine splintered from the gleaming metal and Perspex hatch-covers. Like magic the spinning wheels drew back with a coy flutter of panels and folded into their wells.

Two more of the Avengers followed down the deck, roared in unison as they turned and then snarled with buzzsaw stridency to gain their position behind Glade. One by one they followed, each taking the plunge off the teak and dipping for the climb and swinging around over the soapy wash of the escort destroyer that stood off the carrier's port beam. At four thousand feet they took up the pre-arranged formation and set themselves out in a Vee-of-Vees behind Glade's No. 1 section. Jiggs had asked Claymore about that, an hour before they had reported to the No. 3 ready-room.

"By rights," he had said, "we should go in line-astern for a torpedo attack. That's what they say in the book. But from my way of thinking, we're all in each other's way—or else we let the rear-position guys see too much. They can see too much, you know."

Claymore knew what he meant by that. If you attack in the last section,

and you spot three or four of your own outfit piled up in the sea ahead of you, you get an awful yen to pull out and flip the pickle from some ungodly distance. You can see too much coming in on the last section from line-astern.

"You guys went in—how?" Glade had asked. They were back on that again. Were they going to base all tactical strategy from now on, on what had happened out at Midway?

"We started off in four sections of two with the Skipper up front with a seventh. That's how we went in—what was left to go in. You see, we lost the Skipper right off."

"Who took over?"

"No one! Hayes had told us right from the beginning to get a torpedo in—to get one in, any way at all. I suppose we went in cold. Some got in—but they didn't get out. I didn't get anywhere near, except to see what happened," Claymore explained dubiously.

"You mean they all went in cold—on the same side?" Glade pumped incredulously.

"Sure! We were being swatted like flies by the Zeros. We just went in for the first hunk of ship we saw."

GLADE contemplated that scene, biting his upper lip and frowning. He washed it all out and began again. "Now you see what I mean," he beamed while Pinky was finishing his job on the charts. "We go in—if we find her—and I'll take our portside elements in on their portside. You clear on signal and take our starboard gang around her stern and—well, we'll give them two sides to protect."

"You mean you want me to lead half the squadron and take them in?" Ensign Claymore wriggled against the strain of his own misgivings. "But I've never even led a section!"

"Why not? You've had the experience in an attack! You've been through it and come out. That's what counts. Me—I've only done practice run-ins. I've never been off the deck before with a live pickle!"

Claymore tried to make the shutter of his understanding keep up with it all. He sorted the words and tried to remember when they first started calling a torpedo a *pickle*. He tried to remember how many rings of braid a Lieut.-Commander sported on his sleeve. . . . Something about adding half-a-ring. Or was that a lieutenant (Jr. Grade)? Funny how he couldn't remember. But he knew there were section leaders who were lieutenants (Jr. Grade) in their squadron who should be burdened with the responsibility of taking on the starboard elements. Wasn't it enough that a guy had taken over the navigation job?

There were all sorts of details to be gathered from air-plot. It had to be carefully sorted and diagnosed. There were temperature, dew-point, nearest land and recognition-signals to clarify. The flight surgeon back at San Diego had said he would do a stretch as navigation officer to give him a chance to catch up. That showed how much shore-based medicos knew about staff work aboard a flat-top. The bridge navigation officer was one guy—a very large guy with a commander's braid on his sleeve. The navigation officer of a torpedo-bomber squadron was something else entirely—and he wasn't a commander, either.

Ensign Pinky Claymore wished the Skipper hadn't picked on him to lead the starboard attack. All that brought up memories of Mayo Knowlton and her Rainbow Room ideas about leadership. . . .

They caught up and set out their Vee-of-Vees behind Glade's spearhead of four. All this was simple, but as the miles sped below them, the dancing film of the other torpedo attack danced through the unevenly spaced frames of his mind's projector. There were fighters and scout-bombers in the scene somewhere, but the fighters wouldn't be able to accompany them very far.

That's the way it was in the other business. They all took off, and the pattern in the sky looked like a descriptive illustration in one of the photographic weeklies which prove how easy it is for an Air Service to gang up and wipe out the opposition.

Why wouldn't those guys who drew the pictures ever take time to figure out range of action and tankage?

Glade's voice was coming over the radio again. The Skipper shouldn't be doing that. They were supposed to observe radio silence as long as possible, but Glade was new, in spite of his two-and-one-half rings.

Glade shouldn't be talking like that, but somehow a live torpedo in the cradle did things to them, and the compass of the risk they took expanded with the degree of danger they were facing.

"If we spot the enemy units," Glade repeated, "we maintain our present formation until I give the final order. I'll hold that. Section leaders, report!"

One by one they responded and gave recognition of the order. Packey MacInnes couldn't resist another gag to Claymore before they snapped off. "Don't forget, Claymore, I'm with you. If you don't bring me back, you'll have to answer to my mother, and she's a firebrand!"

"Pipe down, MacInnes!" Glade ordered.

Another mother to answer to, reflected Claymore. There was another drawback to this business. Too many



mothers who asked too many questions. There was Pelotti's mother in Detroit, who demanded over and over what had become of Tony's wrist-watch. She'd given Tony his wrist-watch on Christmas with an order forbidding him to wear it if there was any danger of its being damaged. Pelotti had dutifully written and assured her he *never* took it with him on patrol missions. Someone ought to know what became of it. There was a pecuniary-sentimental value to it now.

Husdren's mother really nailed him down. She was a limpid lavender female who reminded Claymore of a funeral spray, and she had arranged the interview with all the gloomy deliberation of a mortician. The shades were drawn and an old clock gonged somewhere along a Stygian hall. Claymore had squatted gingerly on the edge of a creaky horsehair chair, twirling his cap in his hands, his fingers slipping against the sweat-band.

Mrs. Husdren had sat down, straightened her skirts, placed her elbow on the arm of her chair, carefully mounted her facial cameo in the prongs of her osseous fingers and commanded sepulchrally: "You may now proceed, Ensign Claymore."



The great wall of Mitsubishi steel was rushing toward him. Claymore waited another second, then punched the torpedo-release.

When he had finished she arose, carefully raised the shades and concluded: "Thank you. Charles was always a good boy. He always did as he was told. I suppose you could do with a drink?"

That was the closest Ensign Claymore ever came to getting drunk. After that he told the story right. He really liked Mrs. Husdren.

THE Avengers roared along the prescribed course for more than an hour. The Wildcat fighters stormed up, circled ahead and then raced back for their floating base. The scout-bombers swung off on another course, and the torpedo planes were alone.

Denning commented on that over their inter-communications phone and Claymore explained that there probably wouldn't be anything doing.

"Did you have fighters with you in that other scrap, sir?" Denning inquired. His voice seemed to be coming off an old wax record and for a minute Claymore had to reassemble the words and place them in their proper time bracket.

"Sure, we had fighters with us," he spoke back. "Zeros—but plenty!"

"But you got that big Jap cruiser," Denning insisted.

"Someone did," agreed Claymore abstractedly. "Someone got in. We never found out who. I don't know who got her. I suppose I should know, but it didn't seem to matter then."

"No. What does it matter, so long as someone got her?" the radioman agreed as he checked the formation.

Claymore was startled by that. He pondered on Denning's philosophy. He wondered why Denning should take the long view of it. Denning, just a radioman second-class, drew down about ninety bucks a month—maybe. He was taking plenty risk aboard these tin-fish carriers. Funny about guys like Denning. They plug away like hell and annoy everyone from the Skipper down to get a flight rating. Ashore, they're just gobs. You can't tell them from the pharmacist's mates or the signalmen when they're scrambling for the liberty boat. Queer about Denning, saying it didn't matter who got the big Jap cruiser as long as someone got her. What the devil did they see in just having "ARM 2/C" after their names? The public which has been spoon-fed on the glorious deeds of the ace pilots simply can't assimilate the fact that a man may take the air, ungilded

with the braid of commissioned rank. But Denning had simply said: "What does it matter, so long as someone got her?"

Claymore turned in his seat and looked at Denning and tried to figure what lay behind that heavy-featured face. The radioman stared interrogatively with his eyes for a second, and then smiled. It was a sincere substantial smile that lit up his whole face. Claymore reflected quickly that it was really a smile, not a grin, and he felt it had loosened something that had constricted his chest for weeks.

"You got any metal-polish in your sea-bag, Denning?" he asked with a mulled grimace.

"Sure. I guess so, sir."

"Good! Stick with me, kid; maybe you'll need some."

"I don't get it, sir."

But the earphones were jangling anew, and the voice of Glade came back from the spearhead unit. He was reporting three enemy observation ships and several columns of smoke just ahead. That was for the Air Officer's information back aboard the carrier.

Denning slapped him across the shoulder-blades and mumbled something about Zeros upstairs. Glade's

wings were being wagged, and the lead section was going down stiff for the torpedo-attack level.

"There's a flock of Nips upstairs, sir!" That was Denning yelling.

"Okay! Okay! They're all yours," Claymore conceded.

"Yes sir."

Glade's voice came over the set again. "We'll take the carrier first. There's a light cruiser ahead, and four destroyers for escort. We'll take the flat-top."

Denning's guns began a mad racket, and the same old feeling of, "*This is it!*" enveloped Claymore. The pilot sat tense, stiff with the pressure of the dive, his nose bloated with the force of the compression set up under the closed hatch. He wondered if he would black out when they leveled off.

Then Glade was talking again, selecting his words carefully: "I'll take the port-side elements in direct. The starboard elements will attack behind Claymore of No. 2. . . . Repeat, Claymore."

The anti-aircraft was thudding its percussion chorus, and they charged through the concussion and smoke. Claymore managed to repeat the order between bursts by Denning, who was tripping short jolts of .30-caliber stuff at the Jap fighters.

"Take it away, Claymore!" was the last he heard from Glade.

Three Zeros sliced past when Claymore wagged his wings and took the starboard element away. They were down low now, and just skimming the chrome-plated waves.

Here it was again. Zeros, and a great wall of metal ahead—a wall of metal that flicked and spat flame. An Avenger came out of a smoke-blob, completely out of control, raged at the sea and went skimming blindly on its belly, leaving a series of circular dabs until it caught a wing-tip. Then it cartwheeled over and exploded.

THE Zeros were screeching down from above, their rifle-caliber tracer selecting the bead for the heavier crump of air-cannon shells to follow. Denning yelled something, and a flame-scarved mass of dural and smoke plunged into the ocean a few dozen feet ahead of Claymore's flailing prop.

"Take it, line-astern, starboard elements!" he spoke clearly into the throat mike. Then he remembered and added: "Watch out for the spurts put up by their main batteries. Watch out for spurts!"

He wished he had borne down on that to Glade before. He hoped Glade would have caught it. It was the old Jap trick to direct their big guns at the sea ahead of them. He was glad he had remembered that.

"Go ahead, sir!" Denning yelled. "They're all with us!"

"We'll need a lot of metal-polish—if we make it," gagged Pinky. "Who got that Zero?"

"What does it matter?" Denning began his routine again.

"Remember, Claymore," the voice of Packey MacInnes came over the set, "I'm with you, baby!"

"We're all with you," someone else squealed from the chain of torpedo planes behind.

CLAYMORE signaled and made his turn over the two trailing Jap destroyers, and then glanced quickly across at the carrier. He saw several Zeros beetling along the deck and then choked on a dull cry.

The lead Avenger of Glade's element slammed headlong into a geysering spout of water that came up from a low-angled five-incher. The hapless plane smacked into the climbing column of green and white; Claymore saw the wings break away and skim forward past the column of water, and go skipping across the shrapnel-spiked rollers with the abandon of two skipped stones.

He closed his eyes and remembered that Glade was leading that element. Glade should have watched out for that spurt business. That's where experience counts. . . . Claymore remembered telling Mayo Knowlton about that spurt business. Now, because Glade hadn't appreciated that danger, he was left in full charge. This was the leadership stuff that Mayo had burdened him with back there in New York.

This was it! This was what he'd come out of the other scrap for. No extra braid, no gay ribbon of blue and white with a scarlet stripe down the middle. Just an extra load of responsibility. Leadership, they called it. But as Denning would say, what did it matter who got it, so long as someone got it?

Good man, Denning.

Claymore knew what he was in for now. He knew what was expected of him—braid or no braid. The others had never seen this sort of thing before. He knew what they were thinking. Each one was watching his wing-tips. He had to go through with it now. He couldn't sneak out, because he had to show them how to avoid shell-spouts. They wanted to see how it was done—with a live pickle aboard.

The thud of heavy ack-ack and the whiplash of pom-poms piled up the opposition against him. He nosed down a foot or so lower and risked his prop-tips. The guns in the main batteries were belching and sticking serpent tongues of flame through the bolsters of smoke. He zigzagged and warned them again and then assumed the brunt of command.

"Torpedo attack!"

This was the leadership they had saddled him with, but he was riding it instead. The snarl of Denning's guns added a mad scrap-happy obligato to his reasoning. He had to get through and show them how. Good God! It was big enough, and they must have passed through the worst of it now. There had to be a law of averages, and some of them had to get away. Law of averages says you can't lose ten every time.

He saw the five-inchers flick flame again, and he pressed the rudder and changed course. A clutching fist of sea exploded off his port wing-tip, reached up—and missed! He held it, and saw the full details of the carrier's great hull. An Avenger screeched and came up in a slicing zoom from the other side, and Claymore changed course back again as another bellow of rage roared up on the starboard side.

A Zero charged at him, and Denning's guns met it head-on. The Jap fighter jerked, nosed down, struggled to recover and fouled a wing-tip.

"Base over apex!" commented Ensign Claymore.

The great wall of Mitsubishi steel was rushing toward him now. He waited another second, then punched the torpedo-release button. The Avenger leaped joyously with relief from the load. Claymore hunched up in his cockpit and continued on, holding the dancing warplane down until he could see the porthole detail in the plates of the hull. Then with a low cry he brought the stick back and ripped her up over the depressed stacks. He banked sharply to clear a stubby mainmast, glanced back and saw a steely-white gash hissing toward the carrier.

He was in the clear and leveling off before the torpedo smacked in.

"Someone got one home, sir!" reported Denning, championing on the oily thumb of his glove. "You really did a job, sir."

"Someone had to, Denning," explained Ensign Claymore. "The law of averages—and experience, y'know."

ELEVEN battered warplanes reformed behind Claymore's torpedo-bomber. They circled and stood off while the enemy carrier reeled and wallowed through the wreckage-strewn rollers with what headway she had left. The Zeros sought sanctuary on the deck of a mother ship that could offer no succor. The escorting destroyers moved in to stand by and pick up the survivors who were already abandoning ship and slithering down over the explosive-battered torpedo bulge.

"Well, we did the best we could," reflected Ensign Claymore. "Next time, I'll have had more experience. We'll have to go again—of course."

A story by the man who wrote "A Gentleman of Old Arizona."

by RAY NAFZIGER



Good Luck, Sheriff!

NO one, without actually experiencing a windstorm in Sad Frog under the Black Rock Mountains, could realize the insidious way in which dust sifted under tablecloths and into bread-boxes and over people's souls.

"Yes, over their souls," thought Miss Laura Bell, as she whisked powdery films from her service- and dining-counters and shelves stacked with water-tumblers and thick china. You simply couldn't keep a restaurant tidy

in a howling Sad Frog windstorm, and she particularly wanted it tidy now for the four men who sat at the counter, finishing a late dinner.

As a fresh gust of wind hung new curtains of dust at the windows, Miss Laura's eyes rested briefly but tenderly on the youngest of the quartet, Sheriff Liam Crocker. When Liam had been foreman on the ranch adjoining her father's, he had ridden over regularly twice a week to call. Miss Laura rather thought that when

Liam had his office running smoothly, he was planning to ask her to marry him. But she couldn't be certain; to many men, the daughter of a well-to-do rancher, and the same daughter after her father has gone broke and she has opened a tiny cow-town restaurant, aren't the same girl at all.

TODAY Liam hardly appeared to see her. Of course he was occupied with the job of catching the bandits who had held up a train twelve hours



Slowly Miss Laura set down the tray, with the care demanded

before, blasting open the express-car safes and killing two trainmen before vanishing into a howling windstorm. A railway mail clerk had identified the men as members of a gang that had been holding up banks in Texas. The storm had covered the tracks of their car, but the bandits were still somewhere in Malapi County. Sheriff Liam had seen to that by promptly blocking the few roads that led to the outside world.

BETWEEN the tall Sheriff and the beanpole rancher Ab Cloud, sat spry little Ben Doty, owner of a general store in the county seat, and white-mustached Judge Alexander Grow, who had come to Arizona before the railroads. The four men had been playing their weekly game of poker

when word of the robbery had reached the Sheriff.

Sheriff Liam stirred suddenly from his frowning preoccupation. "We better light a shuck out o' here," he remarked. "Can't expect those buzzards to come where we are."

"They can't expect us to come where they are, either, long as this storm keeps up," joked Ab Cloud, who was Miss Laura Bell's uncle. "But we might as well head out."

However the four made no move toward their dusty broad-brimmed hats on the wall rack. Men always removed their hats to eat in Miss Laura's restaurant.

Another savage burst of wind rattled the windows and drew dust shades

over them. Miss Laura started, noticing suddenly that the men's cups were empty. They wanted more coffee before going out again into the storm, but they had been too polite to ask for it.

"I'll bring the pot right away!" she exclaimed and picking up a tray of soiled plates, she hurried through the swinging door into the kitchen.

There Miss Laura stood frozen, holding the tray, staring at the two revolvers pointed at her, and at the dusty faces of the men behind them.

One of the pair stood by the big stove, using his left hand to sop a biscuit in the gravy of a shallow Dutch oven. He was a small man with a thin, prematurely old face and the



by the situation. These men must be insane, to invade a town!

deadly quiet of a diamondback who has dropped the habit of rattling his warnings. The other man was sandy-mustached and tall, and he chewed on a thick sandwich. Miss Laura Bell had seen the thin-faced man before. A week ago he had driven into Sad Frog, stopping only long enough to eat a meal in Miss Laura's restaurant.

There were two others—one standing near the small square opening in the wall between the dining-room and kitchen. A short-statured stocky man, he held a sawed-off double-barreled shotgun pointed at the backs of the Sheriff's party. In his mouth, like a harmonica, was a chicken leg. The fourth sat slumped on the floor at the back, with a carbine propped between

his knees. A bloody rag was wound around his bare head.

Slowly Miss Laura set down the tray, with the care demanded by the situation. To these desperate men she wasn't a girl—just someone whose scream could set immediate pursuit on them. They were more than desperate, they must be recklessly insane, to invade a town!

ROADS and trails, thought Miss Laura swiftly, were too well blocked for them to have reached Sad Frog by car. They must have walked or ridden horseback along Salt Wash and into the town, to climb the arroyo bank and from it to enter the restaurant kitchen.

Only a few seconds seemed to have passed since she had entered the kitchen, but it must have been longer, for her uncle spoke from the outer room; his mildly reproachful drawl barely rose above the rustle of dust sweeping along the street:

"Laurie, we're still waitin' for that coffee—if it aint too much trouble!"

The men in the kitchen, even the wounded one, tensed. The man with the shotgun pressed the stock hard against his shoulder, crooking his forefinger around a trigger. Sandy Mustache hastily began dumping food into a grain sack.

It was her move, Miss Laura realized: if she did not answer her uncle, he would come to investigate. She stepped to the stove, lifted the lid of the big coffee-pot and let it clatter



Sheriff Liam swept Miss Laura from her feet to the floor, where he made a shield of his body.

down. "Coming, Uncle Ab," she called. "Fire was almost out. This stove never does draw in a hard wind." She kept her voice casual and as natural as possible.

"Let me go in to fill their coffee cups," she whispered to the thin-faced man. "It's the only way you can get away without being followed. Those four are all my friends; I'd do anything to save them from being hurt. They'll leave just as soon as they drink their coffee."

"Better let her go, Dogie," advised the sandy-mustached one in a hoarse whisper. "We could grab us a car, but them horses is our best bet. We kin take her along on that extr' pony."

"Take 'em their coffee," ordered the thin-faced man, speaking aloud but in a voice that carried no farther than a whisper. "But we'll be watchin' you. Try to warn 'em by even one word or

look, and buckshot will splatter them and you all over that room in there."

Miss Laura well knew what two buckshot loads sent from a sawed-off scattergun meant at close range. Nodding, she picked up the pot. She would have to pour coffee with a steady hand, and when she spoke to Liam and Uncle Ab and Judge Grow and Ben Doty, she'd have to keep her voice even and her talk on casual things.

THAT was in effect the order which had been given her, but she wasn't obeying it. Nobody should ever be able to say that the new Sheriff had sat idly sipping coffee a few feet from the train bandits; or to remark, "Sheriff Liam shore does like his coffee," slyly hinting that Liam had known the bandits were in the kitchen at the time and had been afraid to go in after them.

She had to warn the Sheriff's party, but in such a way that the bandits wouldn't recognize it as a warning. "All of 'em are poker-players," said Miss Laura to herself as she appeared bearing the coffee-pot. "Good poker-players—mighty good poker-players."

"Thought you'd gone to sleep, Laurie," said her uncle. "Why aint Antonia helpin' you today?" Antonia was the old Mexican woman who occasionally helped Miss Laura in the restaurant.

Miss Laura's hand and voice were both steady as she began filling cups. "Didn't I tell you Antonia has to stay home to nurse her family? Poor thing! All her children are down with the whooping-cough. And you know how dangerous whooping-cough is to Mexican children as small as Antonia's."

NONE of the four said a word at this or even glanced at her. It was exactly as if she hadn't spoken. Sheriff Liam eyed the brown liquid pouring into his cup. He and the others knew that Antonia's children were all far past the whooping-cough stage, with children of their own and in addition no longer living in Sad Frog. The men, Miss Laura judged, with twelve hectic hours of bandit-hunting behind them, were too tired to catch her hints.

She tried again. With all the cups filled, she picked up the half-empty sugar-bowl, took it back to the counter and filled it from a sack in a drawer, a sack filled with salt.

"One is what you always take, Liam," she said, returning to drop a heaping spoonful into the Sheriff's cup.

Liam took neither sugar nor cream, but now he stirred the liquid-absent-mindedly and then tasted it. His face did not change expression. The knot-head, thought Miss Laura exasperatedly; he didn't even taste the salt!

"More sugar, Liam?" she asked, poisoning another spoonful.

"No, thanks," he said. "Antonia got her kids here in town, has she?"

Miss Laura nodded, trying to keep her heart from thumping against her apron front. "Yes. They're in that tumble-down 'dobe where the fellow who used to own the Diamond Bar lived. I declare I've forgotten his name—Jim somebody, wasn't it?"

The owner of the Diamond Bar had been, as all of them well knew, one Jim Kitchen. It was pretty far-fetched, but Miss Laura hoped that the Sheriff would make a stabbing guess that what she was trying to get over was "kitchen."

The Sheriff tasted the coffee again and squinted at the dust curtaining the front windows. Ab Cloud stretched his long arms and yawned prodigiously.

"In my opinion," observed Judge Grow in his heavy judicial manner, "those miscreants will get clear into California if we don't keep moving. We are only wasting time sitting here."

Miss Laura's heart beat a little harder. The four had guessed the truth. She knew what they intended: If the bandits were within reach, they were going after them.

"Poor Antonia," she repeated, and poured more coffee into her uncle's cup. "I don't know how she and all those sick children would get along if it wasn't for Mr. Bisbee looking after them."

Ten years before there had lived in Sad Frog an old professional gambler named Bisbee. He had been known as "Buckshot" Bisbee, never as Mr. Bisbee. Most people in fact simply called him Buckshot. Maybe "Mr. Bisbee" might warn the four what threatened from the kitchen.

"That's nice of Mr. Bisbee," said Liam. "But to get at locatin' those bandits: Maybe we could do better if we split up to hunt 'em. I been thinkin' of an old wood-cutter road over in Tyrone Cañon they might have taken. Doty, s'pose you head for the garage and see if Dave Baker can't give you a car to drive out there."

Dave Baker ran the garage in Sad Frog; the back door of his shop faced the back door of Miss Laura's restaurant.

Doty nodded. "Rough road for a car, that one in Tyrone Cañon."

"Look close for tire tracks where the wind didn't hit," instructed the Sheriff. "And, Ab," he went on, "why not try to get a horse and cut across to Les Shore's place?" Les Shore was the Sad Frog saddle-maker. His side window looked across the vacant lot next to the restaurant.

"And, Judge," continued the Sheriff, "you might try to find a way of getting out to Dorman's."

DORMAN'S was the Sad Frog hardware store two blocks away where in emergencies posses were equipped with rifles and cartridges.

"But, Liam," complained the Judge irritably, "those bandits won't go anywhere near Dorman's." Judge Alexander Grow wanted to be in on the shooting.

The Sheriff chuckled good-humoredly. "That's why I'm sending you there, Judge. After all, you're seventy-three and you wouldn't want to be where bandits are liable to come shootin' about."

"How about the Bell outfit?" asked Ab carelessly. "Someone ought to be lookin' out there, Liam."

"I'll tend to that myself. And I think you rheumatic old *caballeros* ought to start before this dust gets any worse."

Ab Cloud snorted derisively, and the men reached for their hats, turning so their eyes would not have to look toward the opening where a shotgun covered them.

Then they filed out leisurely, courteously falling behind old Judge Grow. Ben Doty took a cigar from a box in the glass case at the end of the counter, bit off an end and lighted it. In the doorway the leather-faced Ab Cloud stopped and stretched again.

While the others were passing out the Sheriff stationed himself lazily so that his long length was between Miss Laura and the opening in the kitchen wall. Now as he turned toward the outer door, Miss Laura's heart slowed. Liam was going to leave her here; he didn't understand that the bandits, realizing that she had warned the Sheriff's party, would shoot her down as soon as the firing started; or they might take her along as a shield against bullets. Either way she'd have no chance.

She didn't care. No one would say now that Sheriff Liam Crocker had sat drinking coffee under the eyes of the men he was hunting. And anyway, Miss Laura thought drearily, what was there ahead for her in life? Just years of running this restaurant with an occasional wind kicking up dust and men dropping in to greet her politely as "Miss Laura," eating, giving her money which she would take with a little flush of shame. It was like charging guests who had dropped in at her father's ranch. . . .

She smiled at Liam with lips that were suddenly trembling. She wasn't a poker-player: she was only a woman in love.

"Good luck, Sheriff!" she said.

Still standing between her and the shotgun, Liam placed the elbows of his long arms on the edge of the glass cigar- and cigarette-case.

"I think I have always had good luck, Laura," he said deliberately. "But it may change, and this time I might not come back from where I am going. I've put off the telling until a queer time, but I want to say now you are the finest woman I ever knew. I had hoped that before long I'd be in a position to ask you—well, to ask you to quit this restaurant for the job of running me."

She looked at him for a few seconds dumbly. Then, "Did you, Liam?" she exclaimed, and she forgot the pointing shotgun.

"Why, of course," he went on, surprised. "I thought that was understood between us. But it just came to me now that if anything happened to me, I'd want to have told you before." Then he was stepping past the glass case and behind the counter to put his arms around her. Tightening them, without warning he swept her from her feet and to the floor behind

the counter, where he knelt over her, making a shield of his body.

A blast came from the shotgun and the shattered glass case showered over them. A second later the other barrel splintered the counter. Then the Sheriff, carrying his old single-action revolver, was racing behind the counter toward the swinging kitchen door. Before he reached it, guns were sounding—from the garage, the saddle shop and in the kitchen—in ragged bursts that were flattened and dulled somewhat by the storm.

FOR several seconds there was an uproar of yells and gun-shots. Miss Laura, sitting on the floor, retained a memory of Liam's back just before it had disappeared behind the swinging door. She waited, too weak to get up, fearing to go into the kitchen. The guns were exploding farther away now, ending in one final shot, after which there again sounded the dreary rattling of windows in the wind and the slithering of dust over packed earth.

From where she sat she saw on the floor near the street door a miniature gray drift of dust, looking somewhat like a dead mouse.

"You simply can't keep a restaurant clean," she murmured as she arose. "Not in Sad Frog in a windstorm, at any rate."

Standing, she gripped the edge of the splintered counter tightly and listened. Boots clumped about the kitchen and men talked there in muffled tones. She was standing there, holding to the counter to keep from falling, when Sheriff Liam Crocker came back through the swinging door. Blood had oozed through the shoulder of his shirt, but he quickly showed her that he could move his arm.

"Just splinters from that counter," he told her. "Don't go into the kitchen, Laura. One of 'em ended there. Two gave up just outside. One got as far as the bank of the wash. There was one with the horses too; your Uncle Ab 'tended to him. I hated to have it happen in here, Laura."

"It had to happen somewhere," she said. "I'm proud of you, Liam."

"Me?" His surprise was genuine.

"What for? You're the one to be proud of, Laura! You were as cool as Judge Grow raisin' on a full house. There was only one little thing you didn't need to do," he went on plaintively, "—dumping that spoonful of salt in my cup. Plumb spoiling what could have been a man's last drink of coffee."

Miss Laura only smiled tolerantly at that complaint as she hurried to get a broom to sweep up the mouselike drift of dust near the door. Men sometimes were concerned about such unimportant things!

A global war? In this brief story we find two American engineers dealing with the Japs in Burma.

A BURMA



CALCUTTA, May, 1942 (PD). With the Burma Road lost and the road to India not yet pushed through, the Chinese are pressed for supplies to keep fighting. It is estimated that 1,000 tons of freight can be flown in daily . . . subject to attack by Jap air patrols . . . but the mountainous terrain requires a chain of emergency landing-fields . . . to which end units of American Engineers. . .

I OUGHTA bust you one, ya birdbrain. I oughta climb your frame. Pulling a trick like that. Wait'll we get outa this trap. If we ever do, I'll make you smart!"

"But Sarge, how was I to know the detail would move on? Or that the Japs were pushing north with a parallel column? Aw, take it easy. We'll get through them, come night. Anyway, you didn't have to hang back for me. I could've caught up if you'd left some kind of message where we camped."

"How about a sign with an arrow? Ya dumb cluck! I oughta bust you wide open."

"Gee whiz, Sarge, you don't have to get sore. You won't let me explain. You told me to see what was beyond that ridge—"

"And get back by dark! Ya dope! In all my time in the lousy Engineers— Okay, okay, I'll lay off just long enough for you to gimme the rest of it. But it better be good."

"Well, when I topped the ridge there was this column looked like a full company just pulling into the valley beyond. I couldn't tell if they were Japs or Chinese. I didn't think the Chinese had that much equipment—"

"You didn't think, period!"

"Aw, Sarge! I didn't think they could be Chinese, and I didn't think the Japs had got this far. Anyway, I couldn't come back without knowing or I'd get bawled out, so I figured on crawling down the slope through the high grass close enough to take in the details. I thought I could get back out of there and make it to the rendezvous by dusk."

"But, hell, this outfit set up sentry posts before they even came to a stop, and by the time I found out they were Japs and got the information on numbers and equipment, they'd already put a man on the ridge and I was cut off until night fell."

"What was more, caught between that sentry above and the company

below I didn't dare to move a muscle for fear of stirring the grass and giving myself away. Sarge, I was scared paralyzed. I hardly dared to breathe, and all the biting, boring insects in Burma ganged up on me. Look at my face and arms, Sarge, and I'm that way all over—"

"Serves you damn' well right, dim-wit, getting yourself in a spot like that—and me in a spot like this! And who ya think I am, your sweetheart? Skip the sob-sister stuff and get on with it."

"Well, I was in luck in a way. They set up the company down near the stream, but one tent they put up apart from the others. Sort of backed it up against the hillside where there was a tree for shade. It was the captain's tent, a square one, and they left all the flaps raised for air so it was just a canvas roof and I could see everything went on. Only not too good. They used it for an office the rest of the afternoon, a couple of hours, and when dusk fell the captain ate in it by the light of an oil lamp. Just squatted on the ground and had an ankle-high table set in front of him. Ate like a pig too. Used his fingers more than his chopsticks."

"By this time I could pretty soon think of trying to get past that sentry on the hill, only being this close I figured I might's well be hung for a sheep as a lamb; and come dark, it wasn't so risky to get a little closer. . . All right, all right, I'm telling you, aint I?"

"Well, pretty soon the captain was through with everything but the *sake*—I suppose that's what it was—which he was swilling out of a little thimble, and by crawling an inch at a time I got close enough to almost smell his belching. He shouted something at his orderly—he had a soldier on duty in front of the tent—and the soldier trotted off. Pretty soon he came back with a young Burmese girl and a Jap lieutenant following hot. That girl was something I missed earlier. Seems they'd picked up some women during the day but must have kept them under cover while they were setting up camp. Anyway, seemed like this lieutenant was the captain's second in command, and probably the girl was the best of the lot and the lieutenant thought she belonged to him. At least, that was the set-up as it looked to me."

"The girl, what'd she look like?"

"I don't know, Sarge. Young, kind of—"

INCIDENT by Granville Church

Illustrated by Raymond Sisley

"Gwan, gwan, what'd the girl look like? Ya want the back o' my hand?"

"Aw, Sarge, she was all covered up. She had on a bright silk skirt down to her ankles, and a kind of double-breasted white jacket, with a silk scarf pulled over her head with a lot of fringe. Only her eyes showed. Great big eyes. And you don't have to get sore, Sarge. I'm telling you.

"Well, there they were, these two officers, hissing polite at each other like the snakes they were and spitting firecrackers a dime a dozen. But I could tell what it was about all right, with the girl cowering on the ground.

"Anyway, after some minutes of this the captain finally got sore and ordered the lieutenant out, not so polite now, and then had the orderly let down the flaps on three sides, just leaving up the back flap for air. Like I said, the tent was sort of backed up against the hill. . . . All right, all right, you don't have to point that elbow at me. I'm telling you.

"Well, the captain went on throwing those thimblefuls of *saké* down his gullet, and this Burmese girl was all bunched up on the ground, and the Jap started out by just talking to her. Or no, not to her, only at her, for I guess he couldn't speak Burmese and apparently she didn't know Japanese. It seemed he was trying to calm her down like you would a scared puppy.

"But this didn't work. She went on trembling and kept the scarf tight around her head. By this time he was more than half drunk. Well, he stumbled to his feet and made a pass at her, and she gave a little squeal of fright and scrambled up. But he had hold of the scarf and ripped it off, and I could see then she was really kind of pretty, big eyes and reddish brown skin and black hair pulled tight, with gold rings in her ears.

"Anyway, he started playing ring-around-a-rosy to corner her and got between her and the open back of the tent, and she pulled at the front flap, maybe forgetting the soldier there. Anyway, as she pulled it open I could see the soldier facing the tent with his bayonet fixed and gun lowered as though he didn't know what to expect, what with his captain drunk and the girl maybe with a knife.

"Anyway, as true as I'm telling this, the girl hurled herself through the opening and speared herself right on to that bayonet! God, Sarge, I saw the tip come right out her back. She

shrieked just once and I swear you never heard anything like that yell. Honest, my belly turned to jelly in that one minute. Then she dropped and dragged the gun down with her.

"Oh, it was an accident, all right. I don't think she did it on purpose. Just didn't see the bayonet in time, I guess. But maybe it was a good thing for her, because after the captain got through with her he'd probably have tossed her over to the lieutenant and then the men would have had her. As it was, she died in minutes instead of hours.

"Well, the soldier stood there dumfounded, and the captain sobered up all of a sudden when the lieutenant and some other soldiers came running. The lieutenant was mad as a hornet and talked up to the captain right in front of the men, and that made the captain mad. He spouted something that shut the other one up, and pushed the girl with his foot so the body cleared the tent. Then the soldiers dragged her off and the captain dropped the flap.

"Well, the back flap was still up and I could see this guy go for the *saké* again, and he kept it up until he tumbled over and started snoring. That was the cue for the orderly to lift the flap and peek in and then blow out the lamp—only not before sneaking himself some *saké*. Then he went off down to the company tents.

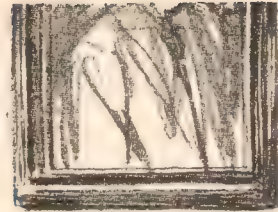
"BY now it was black enough for me to get by that sentry on the ridge, but there I was so close I couldn't pass up the chance of a souvenir, could I? Anyway, the captain was out like the lamp, so I crawled the rest of the way to the tent and felt around for what I could. I knew he had some kind of ivory carving. I'd seen him fingering it. But it was black as a coal mine and I couldn't even scratch a match.

"Anyway, I finally found the carving, and I got this sword and— Oh, that's the captain's blood. I was there that close it seemed a shame not to have him join the girl. Well, I got this sword—and it's mine, Sarge, so don't throw eyes at it—and I rolled up whatever other stuff I could find in this veil he yanked off the girl. . . .

"What? Of course I got his papers! You think I'm dumb? All the company papers. They're rolled up here. I was there that close. . . . Aw, Sarge, what's the use of getting sore? I'm only telling you what happened!"



The MYSTERY



PEOPLE are seldom what you expect, Annabelle considered. Skim milk may masquerade as cream; high-lows pass as patent leathers; gild the farthing if you will, yet it is a farthing still, *Buttercup!* She tried drinking the champagne again, and again it got up her nose and she sneezed; and again the Academician on her left patted her back with a blow good for extra bases.

He said kindly: "You better skip the bubbly, sister, or try holding the schnozzle, one."

"Thank you," Annabelle said weakly, wondering if her back was broken. "The schnozzle maybe I will hold."

At the far end of the banquet-hall a man stood up and started making a speech, and the Academicians scraped around their chairs to listen. Jonathan leaned over Annabelle's shoulder and whispered: "Making out, cookie?"

Annabelle held up a napkin to shield their conversation and demanded: "Who the heck are these torpedoes? I thought this was supposed to be the annual banquet of the National Bibliographical Academy."

Jonathan nodded. He grinned.

Annabelle regarded again the Academician on her left. He had a broken nose, scar-tissue around his eyes, a tin ear. One of his front teeth was broken. His heavy shoulders made

his dinner-jacket look like a fighter's bathrobe. His three companions were generally similar. They were seated with Annabelle and with Jonathan Jaffrey at one of the small tables in the Toulouse banquet-room.

"If these thugs are connoisseurs of rare old books, I'm a Green Bay Packer," Annabelle whispered. "What are they doing here?"

"You're here," Jonathan pointed out. "Whose little bibliophile are you?"

"Well, I'm with you, and you addressed the Academy this afternoon on the place of 'Northanger Abbey' in Definitive Something or Other, so I suppose they think they owe you; and anyway you're the eminent Dr. Jaffrey, full professor of English Literature at Jordan University, and you could get by on your reputation, such as it is, but—"

She had raised her voice, and the Academician on her left brought her attention to the speaker at the head of the room and murmured, gently chiding: "Let the guy have his bats, honey."

"I'm so sorry," Annabelle said demurely.

He gave her an amiable grin through thickened lips; his heavy-lidded eyes traveled down her body, and he liked what he saw and patted her hand and sighed, and turned back to give polite attention to the speaker.

"I know now," Annabelle viciously whispered to Jonathan, "that they must be particular friends of yours. But where are their muzzles?"

"You wrong them," Jonathan said. "They're cops."

"Detectives. I might have known."

"You might?"

She said with severity: "I mean, I might have known that you couldn't get away from crime even on your first leave in six months. But what in the world are they here for?"

"They're working; they're here as guards. They're private noses. Dr. Arnon hired them for the night to stand watch over that exhibition of incunabula over there. Some of those early folios are worth a fortune."

ANNABELLE glanced at the display of rare books, ranked under the lights near the wall. Some of the items were illuminated manuscripts that sparkled like jewels; others were examples of early printing—large flat books, stained and faded with the ages.

She said: "Surely they don't think anyone here would steal any of those things?"

"Some of these collectors would give their half-interest in hell for a chance."

"Why, that's silly." She looked around the room at the hundred or so members of the Academy busy banqueting. Except for the three detectives at their own table, they all appeared to be astigmatic little men with beards. Their evening clothes were rusty. They sat in stoop-shouldered scholarly attitudes. Some were listening to the speaker, hands cupped

of JOHN SWIFT

by William Brandon

to their ears; others were looking at Dr. Groll's exhibition of choice books. "They're pillars of society," Annabelle said. "They aren't criminals. Just look at them."

"That's what makes it an interesting angle of crime. It's a sort of an esoteric hunger; couldn't exist at all in the average criminal mentality. An insidious thing—grows from curiosity to passion to phobia. Capable of turning your respectable pillar of society into the most dangerous of criminals, if it goes that far. Dangerous because the motive always remains abstruse."

"See the little guy who looks like *Rumpelstiltskin*, sitting there by the display? His name's Mark Shaver. He specializes in Caxton. See what he's looking at?"

"Just that it's a book."

"It's a Fifteenth Century edition of Malory's 'Morte d'Arthur.' He can't take his eyes off it; he wants to touch it, get his hands on it, possess it, keep it. Watch his fingers working; look at the appetite in his eyes. He wants that book, not so much to show off, as simply to own, to have, to lock away, to fill out his own collection and make it more nearly perfect, to furnish an inner satisfaction."

"Think of what must be going through his mind. Rabid desire! An emotion—an emotion of the mind. Do you think he wouldn't steal it if he could?"

"Of course he wouldn't," Annabelle said. Mr. Shaver, she thought, looked wholly inoffensive and indeed somewhat pathetic, staring wistfully at Malory's "Morte d'Arthur."

Jonathan disregarded her objection. It is the female nature to be perverse, for the simple hell of it. "He's off his rocker more or less," he said clinically. "That's what it counts up to."

Annabelle gave him a sidewise look. "Well, I don't know. You have your hobby—the psychology of crime. You pounce on every specimen you can find like—like some harpy. Just exactly like that little man with his books, or probably worse. Who are you to talk?"

"Well, most people are more or less off their rocker—or rockers. Certes,

You'd better put all this down. I can use it in my chapter on tangential crime."

Annabelle got her notebook and pencil from her evening bag and inscribed a number of pothooks. The monotonous voice of the after-dinner speaker droned in her ears. He was talking about a man named Goudy, who seemed to be a printer. Whatever he was saying was old stuff to his listeners, who were smoking and chatting or looking at the exhibition of books, while a few were circulating among the tables, visiting friends. The speaker went on in happy unconcern, oblivious to his audience, charmed by the spell of his own words.

CONCLUDING her notes, Annabelle looked up to find Jonathan in conversation with an elderly fat man who had stopped by her chair to show him some paper or other of interest.

Jonathan said: "This is Dr. Arnon, Annabelle. Dr. Arnon is the president of the Academy."

"Greetings, Doc," Annabelle said.

"You should curtsy, child," Jonathan said. "This is my secretary, Miss Sims, Doctor."

Dr. Arnon puffed out his pink cheeks and smiled at Annabelle, and his shrewd eyes made her a little uneasy. His snow-white hair was cropped close to his head; his fat neck bulged out in a roll over his stiff collar. He was, Annabelle knew, a dealer in antique books and manuscripts. Shrewdness was his stock in trade.

He said: "You are a lucky man, Dr. Jaffrey—a secretary so lovely!" He smiled and bobbed his head while he talked, and his sharp little eyes went on studying Annabelle from this angle and from that, blankly, as if she were a questionable autograph. "Red hair and green eyes," he said, smiling and nodding. "The translucent skin, from Titian, yes. Great Scott, what am I saying?" He chuckled and cuffed Jonathan on the back as he turned ponderously away and said: "You are young yet, so you are lucky." And he waddled away, chuckling, shaking his white head.

He swung around suddenly and came back and said: "You may keep



that to study, Dr. Jaffrey, but you will be careful with it, yes?" And for an instant his eyes gleamed again from their creases of fat at Annabelle, and this time they rested upon her fondly and left her feeling naked in her low-cut evening dress.

She said in a small voice when he had gone: "What may you keep to study? Me?"

"This," Jonathan said, waving the sheet of paper in his hand. He gave her a close look and grinned. "You don't like the Doctor."

"Oh, he's sweet, the evil old wretch!" She shivered a little.

"Pah. You women wear clothes that would shame the modesty of a harem slave; you design them deliberately so that men will look at you; and then when men look at you, you are indignant. It's an act. It's an instinctive wile." He spread the paper out on the table and examined it.

"Thank you. You talk about me as if I were a horse."

"Mmm, no, you're not a horse."

"One would never dream you make passes at all your pretty students."

"That's a lie," Jonathan said, unruffled, holding the paper up to the light and squinting.

"Or at me."

"Well, you blandish me."

"I don't either. I hate you."

"I hate you too," Jonathan said. He dragged his pipe out of his dinner-jacket pocket and lit it and slid the sheet of paper over for her to see. "That's an interesting letter. See the brown ink?"

"Yes," Annabelle assented.

"Well, it isn't ink. It's blood."

"I don't believe it." The letters were thick and large and smeared, almost as though written with a brush instead of a pen. But the date at the head of the letter—a few lines of writing in brown ink on creased, dirty foolscap—was 1909. Thirty-four years ago. "Bloodstains wouldn't last that long on paper. They'd fade and go away. Wouldn't they?"

"Maybe," Jonathan said, blowing through his pipe to clear the stem with a syrupy gurgle. "It says in the letter that it's written in blood. The guy should have known. Go ahead and read it."

"*I write this in blood,*" (it read), *"the sacred ink of sworn truth.*

"My joy is a river. My happiness is the bright sun.

"I murdered Rebecca Seward. I only say in my defense,

"Honi soit qui mal y pense."

It was signed, "John Swift."

Annabelle looked at the paper on all sides, puzzled. There was nothing else on it but the four smeared lines and the signature of John Swift. She said, "What is it?"

"A confession of murder."

"Yes, but it's a—a lunatic. Whoever wrote it was crazy. Does it mean anything? Was there someone named Rebecca Seward?"

Jonathan nodded. "There was. She was murdered in a town near Chicago in 1909."

"And this is really the confession of the man who killed her?"

"Well, this was mailed to the Chicago police about three weeks after the crime. A suspect had already been arrested for Rebecca Seward's murder: A woman. The police had evidence this woman's husband had been going out with the murdered girl, and they reasoned the wife had killed out of jealousy. They also had evidence, as I remember, that the wife was in the neighborhood of the scene of the crime, at about the time of the crime. The girl was found on a side-street, shot to death.

"Then this letter came to police headquarters. It had been mailed in Chicago. Detectives made a routine round-up of all the John Swifts in the town and in the city, but none of them had any remote connection with Rebecca Seward, and all of them had alibis for the time in question. Luckily for them! So the cops decided the letter had been written by some crackpot and they went ahead and convicted the accused wife. She got life. But she was released after five years."

JONATHAN smoked his pipe and stared at the letter with a sort of quizzical amusement, and Annabelle heard the speaker grinding on, but now his audience was beginning to cough.

"Because," Jonathan said, "there was another young woman shot to death on a dark side-street in Chicago two years later, and another in St. Louis a year after that, and another in New Orleans the following year, and each time an identical letter came to the investigating police. The letters were mailed in the respective cities, always several weeks after the crime, in most cases after the police had already arrested a suspect, as in the first Chicago case. Illustrates how universal criminal motives are, by the way.

"These other four identical cases convinced justice it had been wrong in the first Chicago case, and the wife was released and pardoned, and the legislature voted her a payment in money for her undeserved imprisonment.

"But that was only the beginning of the career of John Swift."

Annabelle looked at the letter again, and was shocked. "You mean there were others?"

"To date, nineteen."

"To date? He is still—"

"Still going strong. In fact, the nineteenth was only racked up three days ago. That is, the letter came in three days ago. The girl was killed a month ago.

"It happened here in New York. She was shot to death, like all the others. She was found near Gramercy Park, late one night. No one happened to hear the shot. No one saw anyone. There didn't seem to be much to go by, but the cops dug up evidence against the girl's boy friend, a guy with a bad record. He was arrested several weeks ago, only a few days after the murder. His trial is set to come up soon. But now, bingo, the cops have a John Swift letter."

"But it's incredible, that he should go on and on—it's unbelievable."

"There have been cases where the cops have thought so too. There have been other people convicted of two of the John Swift murders, besides the first one, but both of them got pardons too after a few years. You have to believe John Swift by this time.

"Still, it's pretty hard for the police to write off such a list of murders as insoluble and you can't blame them for wanting to clean up a few of them at least.

"As for John Swift, they have never been able to get any kind of a line on him. Nothing whatsoever. Complete blank."

"But why haven't they? The police have all kinds of scientific methods; they are thorough; there have been mass murders before and the ones who did them have been caught. Why should this one go on for—for thirty-four years and never be found?"

"Because there is no motive," Jonathan said gently.

"It's evident that he's a maniac. Isn't that motive enough?"

Jonathan shook his head. "He's never touched these young women who were killed. He's shot them down from a distance and gone on his way. There is no particularly ugly psychosis driving him to kill. That's evident in the letters. Their wording is light, humorous. Consider that last line in old French: shame to him who thinks evil of it. *'I murdered Rebecca Seward. I only say in my defense, Shame to him who thinks evil of it.'* As if it's all a joke—a game. Good for a laugh."

ANNABELLE gave him a puzzled look. "Are the letters always worded the same way?"

"Exactly, except for a different date and a different victim's name. You see, it wouldn't be much use for the police to set a watch on suspicious characters, eccentrics, all the various queers on the lunatic fringe. Not that they haven't done so; they have, with-out results.

"Because it is apparent from the letters that John Swift is probably not a suspicious character, that there is nothing in his actions, his appearance, to suggest a homicidal maniac.

"Instead, the letters indicate that he is probably a light-hearted extrovert, maybe a practical joker, who likes nothing better than a sociable game of anagrams, for example; he seems to be fairly well educated; and who only has this little failing of stepping out now and then and shooting down a young woman for no reason at all."

They were silent for a moment, their eyes on the yellowed, creased paper and the brown writing of the first John Swift letter. The speaker was still under way; he paused to take a drink of water and some restive listeners applauded loudly, but he went on again at once.

Annabelle said: "Dr. Arnon owns this letter?"

"He owns the whole series, up to the last six years. The various police departments keep the letters a certain length of time, for use as evidence if and when they bring in John Swift, but after so many years they will sell the originals and keep photostatic copies, and old Hans is always on deck to buy them. He's made a private hobby of collecting these letters for years."

"Would they be worth anything? Could he sell them?"

"Probably the complete series would be worth quite a bit of money to collectors. They've been written up in the bibliographic magazines. The amazing John Swift letters hold a unique place in the field of holographic curiosa, they say." He fingered the letter and again held it to the light

and peered at it and finally folded it and put it away in his wallet. "This is the first one of the originals I've seen."

"And now that you've seen it, what?"

"I'm bemused withal, I guess." He put the wallet in his pocket, knocked out his pipe, and looked at his watch. "It's about time to blow."

"Oh, no," Annabelle demurred. "Not right in the middle of that man's sterling speech."

"*Honi soit qui mal y pense*," Jonathan said. He leaned over the table and punched with a finger the beefy private cop on Annabelle's left and bent his head toward the exit. The cop, who had gone to sleep some time before, woke up with a snort, and nodded, and got up and came along with them.

In the hotel lobby Jonathan said: "Ten-thirty; time to catch your brother in?" And the shamus, still yawning, said: "Yah, but cheez, I got a date. Sunshine I gotta pick up first. Okay?"

"Okay, sure," Jonathan agreed. "Where is she?"

"In the bar, where else? Wait here, huh?" He left them with a flip of his hand and trotted toward the bar.

"WHERE are we going?" Annabelle asked. "And why with Sunshine?"

"His name's Henry. He's got a brother on the Homicide Squad downtown, a lieutenant. Right now he happens to be working on the current John Swift job."

Annabelle gave him a narrow look. "So that's why you wanted to sit with the help in there. You're all set to spend your leave nibbling in on this swell murder. I'll bet you came to this silly dinner tonight just so that old man would give you his letter to study. Don't you ever do anything without a reason?"

"It wasn't my idea. Dr. Arnon mentioned it to me the other day, when the papers came out with the latest John Swift letter. He thought I'd be interested in it. He made all the arrangements."

"You're not trying to tell me you have some idea of solving the John Swift murders?"

Jonathan laughed. "It'd be worth while if I could. Dr. Arnon told me he'd be willing to put out a solid fee to see the case cracked. He seems to feel he comes by a personal interest in it through owning the letters. But I'm only looking into it for material. After all, it's baffled the police for a generation, as the story books say. Even the great Dr. Jaffrey must be given pause."

"I'm surprised to hear you admit it. I was beginning to think you expected to step out and clear it up before breakfast."



"People that knew her say she used to be a nice kid. She didn't like it because her sister chased around with a hood like that fellow."

"Well, maybe I will. It's a long time until breakfast. . . . But here's Henry."

"Meet Sunshine, people," Henry said, beaming. Sunshine was a blonde. She looked them over and said: "H'lo!"

"H'lo," Annabelle said.

"Well—" Jonathan said; they went out to the sidewalk and got a cab.

THE night was not late, but downtown New York slept, and the cab ran through nearly empty streets, past darkened buildings, until arriving at Center Street. There Police Headquarters, lighted and active, seemed to throw around itself ripples of the

night's business, in news-stands, cars pulling in and out, shoeshine boys, near-by open restaurants.

They found Henry's brother, Lieutenant Shaefer, on an upper floor behind a door marked Homicide. A slim and somewhat dapper little man, greatly unlike Henry, but with a similar amiability. It turned out he had heard of Jonathan.

"I read your book," he said. "'Murder and the Mind,' it was called."

"Professional approval," Jonathan said. "Did you like it?"

"It was corny," the Lieutenant said, smiling genially, swiveling back and forth in his swivel chair behind his desk. "But then, you aint a cop. Look, I'll show you." He pushed a button on his desk. "Henry said you was to come down to talk about the



"Angelo was suspicious. . . . He said, 'You tell 'em the heater's all right.'"

John Swift business. So I give you a cop's angle." To an officer who put his head in at the doorway Lieutenant Shaefer ordered, "Send her in."

"This kid coming in," the Lieutenant went on, "is a sister of the dame John Swift knocked off a month ago. She's been hammering around here night and day since the papers printed that we got that John Swift letter. She says no John Swift bumped off her sister. She says it was the guy we booked for it three weeks ago, Joe Angelo. Joe was hot on this dame and she stepped out on him while he was doing a stretch on the Island last spring, so it looked like he knocked her off for it as soon as he was released. That is, it looked that way until we got this John Swift letter. But this kid sister, she says it was Joe and no John Swift knocked off her sister, and she says Joe was going to knock her off too for talking her sister into stepping out on him, and she says he'll do it if we turn him loose, so there you are. I'll leave you talk to her." He glanced at Sunshine and Annabelle and said: "Sunshine, you and her go outside."

"Oh, yeah?" Sunshine said.

"She thinks it's gonna be a strip show maybe," Henry said disparagingly, sprawling in a chair by the door. "Okay, baby."

The Lieutenant shrugged, and the uniformed cop appeared again at the

door and stood aside and a young girl of seventeen or eighteen, came in on his arm and stood beside him with her head bowed. Her shoulders were shaking. Jonathan realized she was crying.

"Miss Ingles," Lieutenant Shaefer said. His voice was kind. He got up from behind his desk, and the swivel chair creaked, and the girl raised her head.

Jonathan had thought that she would be pretty. Her hair was black, crisp and shining; her figure was young and lissome. But her face was bloated with weeping, her lips were swollen, puffy; her eyes were wild with an animal panic, animal anguish. Constantly the dry sobs shook her thin body. She stared at them but did not see them; she did not look human.

Lieutenant Shaefer moved his hand and the officer turned and the girl went with him dumbly and the door closed behind them.

JONATHAN saw Annabelle's face chalk-white with shock and pity. Sunshine looked sick—too many double Martinis while she had waited in the bar.

"Well," the Lieutenant said, "there's a cop's-eye view of a murder angle, Professor. Pretty, huh?"

"She should be under a doctor's care," Jonathan said. "She's close to insanity."

"The doc sees her. What can we do? Bellevue, sure, sooner or later, but when we drag her away from here she goes bats wholesale, you can see that. She was cut up enough when her sister got knocked off, see, but when the John Swift thing come up and everybody tells her now Joe Angelo gets loose again she got scared, and that's what really done the business as you see it." He sat down again in his swivel chair and said sardonically, "Interesting case, huh? People that knew her say she used to be a hell of a nice kid. She didn't like it because her sister chased around with a hood like that fellow who calls himself Joe Angelo. Don't know his real name. She's a real nice kid."

"Why did you tell her Joe Angelo would go free?"

"I didn't tell her. People in her block told her. So she come and ast. Can we say he won't go free? Even if we go ahead and try him, how can we beat a John Swift letter with a jury?"

"You're going to try him?"

"I don't know. Ask the D.A. Confidentially, my guess would be that the D.A. will try to show Joe wrote the John Swift letter himself, but that's thin. We had old Dr. Arnon down here. He says it's genuine."

"Do you think it's genuine?"

"Confidentially," the Lieutenant said, "I think Joe was out to knock the broad off, yes. But I think John Swift beat him to it. One of those one in a million things. There aint no doubt about this John Swift, you know. He's knocked off nineteen dames. He was writing his letters before you or I was born. In this case it just happened Joe was in a spot to get picked up for it before we got his letter."

"What about ballistics? Anything on the gun that killed her?"

"We got the slug. We never found the gun. You never find the gun on a John Swift job. Of course up until we got the letter we was looking for it on the theory it was Joe Angelo's heater."

Jonathan got out his pipe to light and then stood rapping the bit against his teeth, thinking. He said suddenly, "What do you think of John Swift, Lieutenant? What's your idea on him?"

"I got a theory on that," the Lieutenant said with some interest. "It's a traveling salesman. See? He aint got any family. Year after year he travels around, living in hotel rooms. And naturally he's nuts. Only nobody don't know it. He's nuts the way a guy goes nuts living in hotel rooms. Some of 'em gambles and some of 'em drinks and some of 'em just stands it sitting there night after night, year after year looking at a Gideon Bible and writing reports, but this particular

guy went nuts in the way that he started this game. It's a game, see? That's what it is. It's a game."

"Cheez," Henry said, rolling his head in disgust. "What a brain."

"Okay," his brother said. "Who the hell ast you?"

Jonathan said, "About this girl—is she being held?"

"Held? No. She hollers for us to put her away and protect her. We lock her up and she hollers to get out. We been letting her hang around. Tomorrow the Inspector's gonna do something with her."

"Then we'll talk to her tonight," Jonathan said, "if it's all right."

"Sure. Talk to her all week."

"We?" Annabelle asked faintly.

"It might be a good idea," Jonathan said, "to take her home with you. We'll get a doctor and a nurse. I want her able to talk by tomorrow morning. Maybe Sunshine will help you."

"Gee, thanks," Sunshine said.

"The guy knows what he's doing," Henry said.

"And thanks to you for a crummy evening," Sunshine said. "All right, kid, come on. See what happens when you go out with a flatfoot?"

"I AM dying on my feet," Henry said. It was the afternoon of the next day. Jonathan and Henry were still in their dinner clothes of the night before. They were ringing the bell of Annabelle's apartment.

Jonathan yawned and leaned against the wall on one side of the door and Henry closed his eyes and leaned against the wall on the other side. Sunshine opened the door. Her hair was in curlers.

"My Gawd," she said, and Henry opened his eyes. "Where have you been?"

Annabelle appeared behind her and Jonathan and Henry entered past Sunshine's hostility.

"Where *aint* we been!" Henry said. "The telegraph, the telephone, the library, the newspaper-room, uptown, downtown, Headquarters, ballistics, homicide, the Tombs, the newspaper-room, the map-room, the telephone, the telegraph. Where *aint* we been! I am dying on my feet."

"All right, die. What was it for?"

"A job, a job! A thousand-dollar fee, he says. A thousand fish, he says. A G note, he says. We'll get it, he says. A thousand-buck fee from Dr. Arnon, the old guy I was working for last night. Aint it worth it?"

"You mean," Annabelle said, "you've been out solving the John Swift murders. Is that all?"

"Tried to get done before breakfast," Jonathan said. "Couldn't quite make it."

Annabelle looked at Sunshine significantly and then asked with polite-

ness, "You have unearthed John Swift? I'm sure society will be grateful."

"No," Jonathan said. He sat down and rubbed his eyes. "Has Dr. Arnon been here?"

"No, but his office telephoned. They said he was sick. What do you want with him?"

Jonathan yawned. "Just waiting to hear from him. I knew he was sick. He's been in bad health for a year. Got up out of bed to go to that dinner last night. But I thought my news might cure him. I called him up this morning. Well—" He rose and looked at Henry. Henry was asleep. Sunshine was sitting on the arm of his chair, stroking his ear.

"You can't talk to that girl now, either," Annabelle said. "There's a nurse with her." She glanced at the bedroom. "She's been sleeping all day. The doctor gave her something." Jonathan waved his hand. "Don't need to talk to her now. Come on. Let's go."

"Me?" Annabelle said.

"I need someone to keep me awake. Good-by, Sunshine."

Sunshine, dreamily twisting a lock of Henry's hair around her little finger, did not answer. Annabelle ran from the room and reappeared quickly in a tweed coat and a little felt hat. "I've never seen you like this," she said as they went out. "You've lost your academic attitude."

"Well, it's the cop's viewpoint, the Lieutenant said." They stepped on the descending elevator.

"Don't tell me you've stayed up all night simply because you felt sorry for that poor girl."

"Well, that started it. But it was something the Lieutenant said. He said they never found the gun from a John Swift job. So Henry and I found a guy Henry knew last night, a reporter on the *Morning Dispatch*.

He did some work in the newspaper morgue and we found out that all of the John Swift victims had been killed with different guns."

"What of it?"

"That's a lot of guns. Nineteen guns to get rid of. Nineteen new guns to buy. He's taking a hell of a chance there on trapping himself, from one end or the other of those operations."

THERE was sunshine in the street and it hurt Jonathan's eyes. A cab slid to the curb and they entered it and he said, "Gramercy Park."

"The scene of the crime," Annabelle said.

"Right." Jonathan leaned back in a corner of the seat and seemed to doze. He said presently: "A character like this John Swift becomes a legend. The passage of years and the success of his game serves to lift him out of any ordinary criminal world and make him the property of the public, the Sunday supplements. In a way, he becomes altogether unreal, even to the police who keep his record in their files. The more fantastic and marvelous he is, the more he is taken for granted. Nineteen murders—nineteen guns. Why did he go to all that trouble? Why—"

"Here we are," the cabby said. He made a U turn at the foot of Lexington Avenue and let them out at the north gate of Gramercy Park. The park, a block of grass and trees surrounded by a high iron fence, existed exclusively for those who lived in the apartment houses facing it. They alone possessed keys for its gates and could go in and frolic through its boscage while the proletariat watched jealously through the bars.

Jonathan and Annabelle waited by the gate, talking, until a colored nursemaid wheeled an infant up to the gate



Illustrated by
Austin Briggs



"He's looking for something," Annabelle said.

and unlocked it; she wheeled the child inside, and before the gate could close Jonathan caught it and held it open for Annabelle and himself to pass inside.

"Most clever," Annabelle said. "Now that we're here—"

"We wait," Jonathan said. "Just wait." They found a bench in the shade and sat down. Jonathan lit his pipe. "I talked to Joe Angelo in the Tombs this morning," he said. "He killed the Ingles girl."

Annabelle was startled. "He just told you so, like that?"

"Well, I looked up his friends," Jonathan said. "So when I went to see him I misrepresented myself. I made like a torpedo."

Annabelle scoffed. "Said he villainously, stroking his day-old beard!"

"Well, I only said Izzy and Kaplan had sent me. They're his friends. I said they were worried. Naturally, he was suspicious. He said, 'Tell 'em I'm all right.' No, I said, they were worried about the heater. He told me to go to hell and I said okay, he

could go to hell. So he said, 'You tell them the heater's all right.'"

"It's all very lucid," Annabelle said.

"It isn't anything you can use in court," Jonathan agreed. "It's only a tacit admission on Joe's part that he killed the girl and that he's made a safe disposal of the gun, so the police can never find it. A criminal of a certain class can't bring himself to throw a gun away, no matter how hot it might be as evidence. That's why ballistics convicts so many of them. It's a strange compulsion. Maybe it's partly fear at turning loose of damning evidence. Maybe it's only because guns are sometimes hard to come by. Anyhow, it told me all I wanted to know. Joe Angelo killed the girl. Not John Swift. Get up, and we'll take a walk around."

They strolled toward the south fence of the park. Some children ran by them, screaming at their happy play, and the noise made Jonathan's head ache.

"Nineteen murders," Jonathan said, "—nineteen guns. And in this last

murder, at least, John Swift was taking credit when it wasn't due him. So Henry and I went to the newspaper-room at the library and looked up the whole series of murders, as they were reported in the press. We found one salient fact. John Swift never wrote his letters until some time after the murders, usually several weeks. Why?

"I tried to establish some connection between the time of the letter writing and the investigation of the murder. I found a connection. It was present in each of the cases."

THEY reached the south fence and peered through it at Irving Place, stretching away below them.

"Some place along that street," Jonathan remarked, "is where the girl was killed. She could have been shot from here." He stuck out a finger and said, "Bang."

"What was the connection?" Annabelle asked.

"Very significant one," Jonathan said. "In each case the letters were

written within a week after the local newspapers had reported that the police had been entirely unsuccessful in their search for the murder weapon, implying that they were giving up any hope of ever finding it. You see what it means?"

"Just that they never found the gun in a John Swift murder."

"It sounds better if you turn it around. John Swift never claimed a murder until he was sure they hadn't found the gun. Thus he was protected."

"Protected? But if he threw away the guns himself, dropped them in rivers, buried them—"

"He didn't. He never committed any of the murders himself. He never used any of the guns himself; he never saw them. But he had to be sure the gun would not be found in a particular case before he could lay claim to it. That's obvious. Suppose Joe Zilch shoots Mary Zilch. Joe Zilch is arrested, but John Swift writes a letter confessing the murder. But in the meantime the police have found Joe Zilch's gun, and they can prove by reliable testimony it belonged to Joe Zilch and they can prove by ballistics that it fired the shot that killed Mary Zilch. What happens?"

"Oh!" Annabelle said. "It proves John Swift is a phony."

"Exactly; it would be asking too much to have the police believe he broke into Joe Zilch's house and stole Joe Zilch's gun to shoot Joe Zilch's wife, no matter how great a mass-murderer legend had made him out to be."

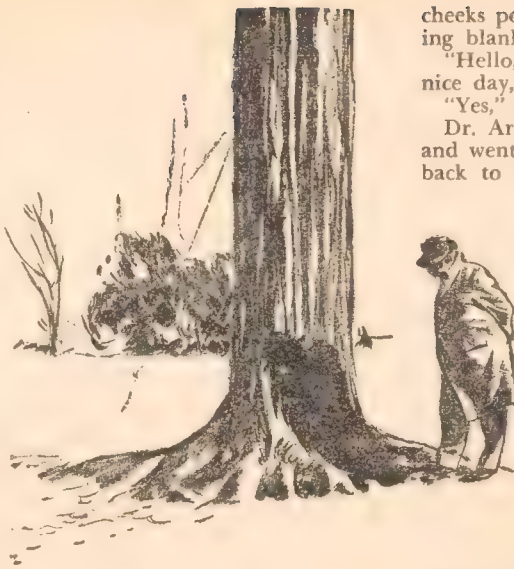
"But the murders," Annabelle objected. "Nineteen, all alike, all young women, always shot, always along some deserted street—"

"Simple enough. He watched the papers. Taking only the seventy-three largest cities in the country, there are four murders committed every day among them. A certain percentage of these are young women. A certain percentage of these young women are shot to death on deserted side-streets, and of this group police investigation fails to turn up the murder gun in a certain number of cases. These were the cases John Swift chose to write his letters about. His *modus operandi* became world-famous, but it was simply that he selected the crime to fit his *modus operandi*, not *vice versa*. Here. Sit down." He indicated a bench at the side of the walk.

"But we're behind a tree."

"That's all right. It's a good tree." They sat down.

"If he didn't commit the murders himself," Annabelle said, "what on earth was his reason for writing his—" She followed the direction of Jonathan's eyes and saw that he was looking around the tree and across the park at the north gate. She saw



Dr. Arnon moved slowly, his gaze on the ground; once he stopped to scuff his toe in the grass.

someone standing outside the north gate on the sidewalk and thought there was something familiar about him, a white-haired fat man, wearing a topcoat with the collar up around his ears. . . . She said: "That's Dr. Arnon."

"Yes," Jonathan said.

While they watched, some of the children in the park unlocked the north gate to let themselves out; they saw Dr. Arnon catch the gate before it could close, and enter the park.

"He got in the same way we did," Annabelle whispered. "Is it some kind of lodge secret?"

"Just common sense—if you haven't got a key."

Once in the park, Dr. Arnon seemed in no hurry to get any place in particular. He strolled along the paved walks, his head bent, his hands clasped behind his back.

"Were you going to meet him here?" Annabelle asked. "Why don't you speak to him?"

Jonathan shook his head and she kept still.

Dr. Arnon had reached the east end of the park and there he stepped off the walk and moved over the grass along the fence.

"He's looking for something," Annabelle said.

They watched him move to the south fence and come along it toward them in the same way, his gaze on the ground, moving slowly in his ponderous gait. Occasionally he raised his head to glance around. Once he stopped to scuff his toe in the grass.

He was within two yards of them before he looked up and saw them behind their tree.

He stared at them for some time, his little eyes completely without expression. At last he smiled, his pink

cheeks pouching up, his eyes remaining blank.

"Hello," he said. "In the park, a nice day, yes."

"Yes," Jonathan said agreeably.

Dr. Arnon nodded his white head and went on, cutting across the grass back to the north gate. They saw

him there waiting patiently for a little while until someone else went out and he went out with them.

Annabelle whispered in something like awe:

"What in the world was the meaning of that? He looked as if he'd seen a ghost."

"More or less," Jonathan said. He got up. "We can go back now."

"What did he come here for? He's sick. You could tell that. What did he come down here for? Why did you want to hide and jump out at him?"

"I called him up this morning," Jonathan said. They went across the park and waited their turn at the gate to be released. "I told him I had reason to believe John Swift was a phony. I said I was going to prove it. I said I had found out that Joe Angelo had killed the Ingles girl, and that he had hidden here in the park to wait for her and shoot her when she walked up Irving Place on her way home, and I said that I was convinced Joe Angelo had buried his gun here in the park and that I was going to come here tonight and look for it. I said if I could find the gun it would convict Joe Angelo and wreck the John Swift legend. I thought old Hans might try to beat me to the gun and he did. He came this afternoon to look for it."

"Why? Why should he do something so fantastic? Would it make any difference to those John Swift letters he owns?"

"I doubt it," Jonathan said. The same colored nursemaid who had let them in went out and they followed her. "He was just playing the game to the end. Let's walk. It's a nice evening."

Shadows fell over Lexington Avenue. Each street intersection was a bright yellow band of the low western sun. The drugstores were turning on their neon lights.

"You said 'just playing the game,'" Annabelle said.

"Yes. He's John Swift."

Annabelle turned her head to look at him and said, "Just like that, you know it."

"No," Jonathan said. "It was always in the letters, his identity. I said something about anagrams last night. It was always there. It was a game, the kind of game a man like Dr. Arnon might find more fascinating than any other, allowing for the quirk in his mind that allowed him to obstruct justice, turn murderers free upon society. Of course that was only incidental to him. The letters, the game, the puzzle, the code, they were the things he played for. To outwit the whole world for a generation, and at his own trade, and then to collect the letters himself and watch them become valuable rarities in the world of expert bookmen, that must have been the best part of the whole huge joke."

ANNABELLE nodded, and he explained: "We were talking last night about a collector stealing some book to satisfy his hunger, his vanity, his urge for perfection in his collection. This stems from the same psychological base. Dr. Arnon, famous as an expert at telling the genuine from the spurious in the world of letters, created the John Swift letters and sat back and watched what was spurious actually become genuine and the joke of it filled his life."

"He put the clues to his identity in the letters. It was there in each letter; it never changed."

"You mean the blood, because they were written in blood?"

"No. Incidentally, they were actually written in blood. I found that out at Homicide last night. The police laboratory used a microchemical test to determine it. But the blood comes from a sheep or a goat or a cow, not a human being. Capillary tube tests proved that."

"No, the clues were in the words of the letters. In a way, they're obscure, but after you see them you wonder how the police have missed them for thirty years."

"It was the second line: '*My joy is a river. My happiness is the bright sun.*' What does that sound like?"

"The Bible, of course. Is it a quotation?"

"Not that I could find. But I went to the Bible to look. There was nothing else in the letters to follow. The last line of old French suggests, naturally, France, and the first line suggests pantheism, but there is no specific field offered in either one for investigation. There was only the Bible, as suggested in the second line."

"Henry and I went through Biblical indices for two hours this morning. We took the line word by word. Joy,

river, happiness, sun. It was when I was working on river that I happened to find it:

"The name of a river that was the border of Moab in the kingdoms of Judah and Israel. The name of the river was Arnon."

"When I looked up the meaning of the word *Arnon* in the ancient Hebrew, I found it meant *swift*."

"Hans, Dr. Arnon's first name, is the German for *John*."

"So, *Hans Arnon—John Swift*."

They stopped at Thirty-fourth Street to wait for the light to change. Down the street the sunlight glittered on the top of the Empire State building. It was getting colder as evening came on.

"It could have been coincidence," Annabelle said finally.

"We spent the rest of the day checking on that. We wired police departments and hotels in all the cities John Swift crimes had occurred in. We worked back on Dr. Arnon's past through the newspapers, speeches he had made, places he had been, and when."

"We haven't got all the replies in yet but there are enough to show that shortly before each John Swift letter was written Dr. Arnon made a trip to the city where the murder had occurred."

"When it's collated it will be proof enough. Naturally, the police have tried that check-up before. Questioning hotels, transient rooming-houses, trying to narrow down a list of people who would have been in the respective cities at the times of the respective crimes. But of course the cops were all working on the wrong time-table. They were looking for a John Swift who had been in each city on the night of each crime, whereas Dr. Arnon never arrived in the specific cities until several weeks after the crime—until the newspapers had assured him that here was a case he could use."

"But you said last night," Annabelle said, "that Dr. Arnon himself asked you to work on the John Swift letters, and offered to help you and even offered to pay a fee if you should find out anything."

"Perfection," Jonathan assented. "The joke couldn't be concluded until the world knew about it. It would be flat for him to come out with a confession, even if it would be believed. No, he wanted the riddle solved, he wanted the world to see how clever he had been, he wanted to be ultimately clever in arranging the solution before his death."

"His death?"

"He's an old man. He's been sick. A friend of his at the dinner last night told me his doctor said he had a bad heart condition and could not live another year. Dr. Arnon knew that. I think he expected to interest me in

the letters and keep me interested in them until his death, and make sure that not long afterward I'd learn the secret of them. He didn't expect me to stumble onto it immediately."

"Well, he didn't know Jaffrey the Great."

"It doesn't make much difference. I wouldn't have stumbled onto it if I hadn't seen that girl last night. I wanted to do something about her, and there was that remark of the Lieutenant's about never finding John Swift's gun. I looked into that to see what I could get and each discovery kept leading to a new angle. I wonder if Dr. Arnon would have liked his joke as well if he'd seen that girl."

"He'd have liked it better." They were past Forty-second Street, pushing through the midtown crowds. It was almost dark. Annabelle shivered. "It's his eyes."

"I don't know. He wasn't likely to have thought much about that side of it. The result of disturbing fate by playing God. Turning souls from their destinies. Maybe that condemned them to immortal torture and maybe it didn't make any difference. He had a Satanic humor and he would have had a Satanic disregard for souls. When the newspapers get hold of it he'll have his picture taken in his hospital bed with the letters in his hands, and he'll will the letters to the Bibliographical Academy and he knows that his name will get billing over Chatterton's in the world of rare books. He'll live notorious forever, the most enduring kind of fame. That will be the best joke of it all. He's no ordinary devil."

"No, he's just bats," Annabelle said. "Bats wholesale—if I want to talk like a policeman."

THEY reached her apartment building, and went up, to find Henry asleep, and Sunshine taking the curlers out of her hair.

"A messenger just came with this," she said, holding up an envelope. "It's for the Professor." She talked with her mouth full of bobby-pins.

Jonathan opened the letter. "It's a check," he said. "A thousand bucks."

"For who?" Sunshine said, taking the bobby-pins out of her mouth.

"I'll wrangle you for it," Jonathan said.

"Oh, yeah?" Sunshine said.

"On second thought," Jonathan said. "I'll split it with Henry." He gave Sunshine the check, and she folded it and put it down the bosom of her dress, eying him suspiciously, and returned the bobby-pins to her mouth.

"There's a note with it," Jonathan said. He passed it to Annabelle.

It was written in brown ink on dirty foolscap.

It read: "*Honi soit qui mal y pense.*"

It was signed: "*John Swift.*"

What Do You Think?

A Readers' Forum

A FREE SOCIETY FOR FREE MEN

AT your suggestion I am attempting a short explanation of the conceptions and the thoughts which are my ever-present daily companions:

It seems that most of my adult life I've been waiting, waiting and waiting, for some sort of crisis ("emergencies" I think, they are called), to pass away and leave me free to work out my own future, my freedom and salvation. World War I, the subsequent boom and then the plunge into the depression, the emergence of "social planning," and now this terribly confusing World War II, has made me desperately weary of trying to adjust, then re-adjust and then re-adjust some more, to rapidly changing conditions which never give me time to assimilate even their salient features.

As a representative of an old American family (dating back in all branches to prior to 1800), I have been brought up in the faith of the inherent ability and decency of the individual. I deeply resent the intrusion of our present so-called "social gainers and planners" into the lives of the American citizen. Our forefathers rebelled against just such "planning" of their lives, and in one way or another managed to immigrate to this land where they constructed the best and freest society for individual endeavor the world has ever seen. The very collectivism and paternalistic society they fled from and fought against is about to be visited upon their posterity.

I prefer to live my own life, make my own mistakes, take my punishments for ignorance and error, and walk the land as a "free man" in all senses of the word. This I feel is the essence of true Americanism and as such must be transmitted to our children. It is their rightful heritage.

The children of America who daily pass in review before me are being imbued with the idea of "collectivist security." This precludes all sense of personal and individual discipline or

What Do You Think?

These are anxious days for all of us. We are united solidly in the war effort; yet otherwise we are a vastly diverse nation; and no two of us have just the same personal problems.

Most of us are interested to know how the other fellow looks upon or solves his wartime dilemmas. And with this idea in mind, we would welcome letters from you, our readers, telling us what you are thinking about—about your business now or your career after the war; the war's effect on you or those dear to you; or if you are in one of the armed Services, a letter which would interest your fellow-readers on your recent experiences or expectations for the future—these within the censorship regulations, of course.

We will pay twenty-five dollars for each letter bought by us. No letters will be returned. All letters submitted will become the property of McCall Corporation. Address: "What Do You Think?" Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Avenue, New York, N. Y.

integrity, and interferences with a freely developed character. They observe, hear, and have constantly demonstrated to them the power of the pressure-group and its corralled votes, the dominating aspect of organized publicity. They are sensitive to the scorn of the group and are afraid to develop individuality. They are afraid to think, for they are prevented from thinking, and shielded from the results of their thoughts. Most of them do not develop the sound individual enterprise, personal integrity or the outstanding characteristics of our fathers, because their environment precludes any and all rewards or punishments for individual accomplishment or failure. In this "mass character" that they are developing they portray, more accurately than we or they realize, the fallacious beliefs of their confused and willfully ignorant backgrounds.

It is with considerable anxiety that I look into the future and realize that, (unless some forces not at present apparent will speed reaction) our invaluable American character of self-help

and responsibility is apt to degenerate into so-called "social responsibility" and "collective help." We may surround the child with magnificent material equipment, with the idea that this will develop his appreciation, when we all know it is only spiritual experience and kindly guidance that accomplishes this. Where today can the child gain access to this latter? The home? It has gone into the defense plant. The church? It is deeply sunk in the problems of saving the souls of our "social groups." The school? What with sugar-rationing, gasoline rationing, civilian defense, plus "short-order" and regular education, the school is as confused as other institutions. Where, then, can our children become imbued with the ideals of our true American way of living? Where? And how to present it to them as a living force which they must acquire? And so I think and think, and am hard put to it to teach even my own children these lessons, for they observe no need for it in our way of life today. What good will accrue to us if we win this war, only to lose, through our misguided and ill-educated children, our only real claim to have developed a free society for free men.

Ohio.

HE'LL CONTINUE WHERE HE LEFT OFF

MY little one-man business, nursed along through privation and struggle had just given promise of success when the war knocked it into a cocked hat. I am still functioning, making barely enough to pay myself a small weekly wage, yet I am hanging on, waiting for Uncle Sam to mobilize me in industry, as he has done his soldiers for the army.

That business was Uncle Sam's gift to me through free enterprise. My brother-in-law who had a one-man printing business in our home is now fighting for our right to conduct our business in our own way. But while

he is fighting, there are many disturbing elements here which threaten my peace of mind.

Unjustified and petulant criticism of any agency which affects our normal peace-time living is one of these. Callous and selfish refusal to do a civilian's share in the war effort is another. Self-seeking Congressmen, quibbling and scrapping for the sake of a PARTY, is another. Labor blocs, strikes, farm blocs, parity, the rising cost of living, higher taxes, tend to make existence a day-to-day adventure, fraught with expectancy, as well as dismay.

But beneath it all I feel a calm reassurance. Despite the turmoil on top of the stream, there flows beneath a national life of such sanity that nothing can ever conquer us. Throughout the large city in which I live I sense the overwhelming sentiment of a people, determined to win, willing to sacrifice, and fiercely proud of their heritage as Americans!

When the war is over I shall add my small voice to the millions who will demand a disarmed and policed Germany and Japan. I shall want my country to take a leading part in the guidance of a wrecked world. And I will continue my business where I left off, in an era of such industrial and economic expansion as we have never seen before!

Kenneth Morse,
Illinois.

IN SPITE OF POLITICIANS

I AM a veteran of World War I. The other day I heard it called our "Model T" war. I am happily married and have three fine children in their early twenties. In short, I am the typical "man in the street."

The graph of my fortunes shows its ups and downs. In 1929 I was modestly well off and had my financial ears pinned back with the rest. That was an all-time low.

Somehow I could never escape the conviction that America was the country about which Horatio Alger wrote so convincingly. Some inner prompting keeps telling me that it simply reeks with opportunities. I realize the heresy of this statement in view of our present-day understanding; however, then, I was either unaware of my limitations or too busy to care for I immediately started over again and by 1941 my star was in the ascendancy once more.

There can be no denying that the past ten years have been pretty grim. The small business men have played guinea pig for the Big-wigs in Washington with no little discomfort to themselves.

I often wonder at their fortitude. They may mutter under their breath, "They can't do this to me," but the

heat is turned on still more and somehow they endure it.

Even now, after years of experience, every new questionnaire fills me with dread. Though my business, up to the current year, was putting bread into the mouths of some forty people, I always have the unhappy sensation that they are aimed directly at me and the author viewed my operations with suspicion.

Perhaps I am incurably optimistic but I believe that our greatest source of strength is internal. Call it pressure of public opinion or what you will. I have the firm conviction that "the man in the street" will stand just so much of this bureaucratic nonsense and then he will put his ears back. Up to a certain point it amuses him to watch the antics of the crackpots. He may even make ribald verse about it but deep inside he is quite positive that, "We the People," has a real significance; it has something to do with his right to like hot-dogs and double-dip cones; to own a car, educate his children and "beef" when he feels like it.

Ever since 1939 I have believed that our entry into the war was inevitable. Pearl Harbor was like a slap in the face. To me it was entirely personal. It made all my other troubles seem trivial. It was my war.

I suffer no illusions about this being "a war to end all wars." I should like to accept this as a fact but I cannot. However I do believe that we can do the job at hand so well, whatever the sacrifice now, it won't happen again in our time. I believe that deep in the hearts of the American people is a resolve deadly in its intensity: The resolve to carry this war through to its logical conclusion. It isn't inspired by hatred or any desire for globular expansion; rather, the firm conviction that the peace and happiness of their children's children depends upon it.

I have been accused of being complacent. . . . I have a boy in the Navy. I live in a small village of less than five hundred population, yet our roster of boys in the service numbers over fifty with one gold star as a result of Pearl Harbor. How could I be complacent? Furthermore every blast from Washington in recent months has served to confirm a growing belief that my business was headed for the discard once again. Its very lifeblood is gasoline and truck service; however as yet I have been unable to work up a very good case of self-pity about it. The fact that I am fifty, an age when the average man likes to dwell upon the security of his annuities, has no bearing on it. I just don't seem to give a hoot.

On the home front the casualty lists of small business men is going to be enormous before the end of the

war. It is sizable right now. There are gloomy predictions about this, "They will never go back into business, our planned economy will make it too difficult," and a thousand other dreaded possibilities. This is all rubbish in my estimation. Men do not change that quickly. The challenge to one's initiative will still be there. Added difficulties will only serve to make it the more attractive. We have always done business in spite of the politicians and I dare say we always will.

I refuse to believe that we have seen the last free enterprise. Something seems to tell me that we have just begun. Nor do I worry about the aftermath of the war. I believe that a people who in a little over a year can groom a mob of clerks and what-not into a streamlined fighting force and forge their broomsticks into formidable weapons of war, can find their way in peace or they deserve to perish.

E. E. Kellogg,
New York State.

TOMORROW

WHEN the long stream of figures that flows over the desk of any auditor on a defense job, begins to make the eyes heavy and the brain weary—then it is that the word *Tomorrow* shoots into my mind like a comet with a long tail of question-marks trailing into infinity.

Tomorrow and tomorrow—and by that I do not mean the parlor pedantry that tries to guess the outcome of the war, nor the childish wonderment that asks, "What will tomorrow bring?" To me it is a burning and vital question that flings itself into the receptiveness of my mind. *What are my obligations to tomorrow and what shall I bring to it?* This is my question and problem, born of the world I have known.

I am an ordinary man with the common heritage of my generation. My father's generation handed down to mine a betrayed country—or rather a betrayed world. My father was vitally interested in politics, and in natural sequence our household was an argumentative one, and every dinner-table was a forum. My earliest and most impressionable years were undated with the cries of great betrayals. Ex-soldiers were sold out—they could not get jobs; Wilson was a visionary—and his vision of a world court was betrayed by his own countrymen, Europe madly scrambling for colonies, and back-breaking indemnities were being levied. Behind all this was the ever-recurrent question: "What were we fighting for?"

All the labor pains of a post-war era were around us and no one could escape their effect. Through them was born our greatest evil, the cyni-

cism of plenty. Plenty of work, plenty of money, plenty of everything and who cares if other countries are suffering—they lost the war, didn't they?

Then came prohibition and its attendant devils of crime and racketeering. Young and adolescent, we saw the law being flouted on every side. The graft was there for the taking; why shouldn't the politicians help themselves? Smug and self-satisfied, the people's morals relaxed, and the cynicism of my generation grew.

Nineteen hundred and twenty-nine came along, and the cynicism of plenty gave way to that of despair. Our fathers damned the banks, the politicians, the system—in fact, they damned everything but themselves, because they did not know or they would not admit that the fault was theirs and theirs alone. For it is the will of a people that amends and changes things, and the inertia of a people that fosters idiocy and injustice. In the ten years that followed, our domestic despair so occupied our minds that we willfully ignored the rise to power of the Fascist nations. Thus again my generation stood betrayed. A war was brought to us, and we were not prepared. We learned to know the awful meaning of "*Too little, too late.*"

By these things do I know that I must not hand down this betrayal to my children. I know now what I have to do. The existence on paper of the Four Freedoms is not enough, for behind them must be the will to preserve them and the education to do it.

FREEDOM TO WORSHIP GOD AND TO SPEAK FREELY will not survive unless we can give our children the faith, belief and will to worship their God and the intelligence and training to direct their free speech into constructive channels.

FREEDOM FROM WANT cannot exist unless the lust and license of "too much" are curtailed.

FREEDOM FROM AGGRESSION cannot be a fact until the will of the people can be harnessed into a mobile and intelligent striking power that will stand as an ever-present threat to an aggressor.

FREEDOM FROM FEAR is the child of these other freedoms and it will come into existence when they are actualities and not a promise. Then there will be no fear.

This, then, is my obligation to tomorrow. I must do all in my power to give my children a clean world. There must be no betrayal of any principle, nor any cynicism in place of ideals, for there cannot be a con-

certed active will to believe in God, if the smug cynicism of an unthinking victor is allowed to despoil the world. I must learn to exercise my freedom of speech so that my children will grow to recognize its power and above all its purpose.

I must learn to strike a balance between thrift and hoarding, that my children may learn the difference between the comfort of protection and the lust of accumulation. Beyond this I must take an active interest in political economy in order to protect the coming generation from clowns and thieves in office. Freedom from want must be a fact.

Freedom from aggression is the greatest problem of all. Let no handful of statesmen sit around a table and make the peace. Let it be drawn up by businessmen, political scientists, and economists. Then let it be presented to the people—and let the people speak. Let it be discussed on the radio, on the street-corner, in the club-room or in any place where different opinions may be found. The people are fighting this war. Let them make the peace. Let them vote. But first we must prepare ourselves to understand this problem thoroughly, because the vote of a fool is the greatest weapon of destruction a democracy can know.

Freedom from fear in itself can not be created by vote, treaty, nor by any rule or regulation. It either exists or it does not. To bring this freedom into existence is my obligation to tomorrow. How to fulfill this obligation? I must acquire knowledge today, and I must pass it on wherever I can. I must learn and teach to others the criminal folly of sitting back and letting others run my coun-

try. The real fight for my country's salvation will come after the armistice, and on the outcome of that struggle rests the decision of what kind of world will I give to my children. This is my problem and your problem—not, what will tomorrow bring, but "*What will I bring to tomorrow.*"

Edward H. Martin,
Marblehead, Mass.

NO PRECEDENT IN AMERICA

THOSE of us who were in school during the hectic twenties were, I believe, the last of the super-optimistic Americans. This has been shown to me clearly since joining the Army in June, 1942, where as a recruit in the air force, I have had occasion to know intimately, as one can know only in an army camp, many young men who were educated in the "depression 30's."

Upon comparing notes with these "beginners at living," I was at first very much puzzled by what I thought must be lack of ambition, or rather the absence of that satisfying assurance I had known at twenty. My schoolmates were all quite confident that they would be huge successes at the game of life—measured almost exclusively in terms of dollars; but these young soldiers were strangely lacking in that confidence. I see now that the future to a boy starting high school after 1930 has never been assured, and induction into the Army for years—an eternity at twenty—has removed what little faith he may have acquired.

We have the best fed, best clothed, best housed and above all the best paid army ever known; and nothing is spared to keep the soldier well and happy, even to denying civilians. Promotions in this army are very rapid, and every soldier can advance with reasonable application to his duties. In fact, compared to the life most of these boys knew before the war, army life is very attractive, except for the enforced absence from loved ones. The peace-time army would be even more attractive, with no necessity for high-pressure preparations for combat, and provision for bringing a wife to Army quarters, and a substantial pension on retirement.

I am convinced that a very large proportion of our soldiers will object to being demobilized; and the longer the war lasts, the more strenuous will be the objections. What will we do with five million men who do not care to disband, and who have earned the nation's undying gratitude on the world's battlefields? There is no precedent in America; but such a force, with their families and sympathizers, can undoubtedly control the nation. The Army must be a tool—a means to an end—and not an end in itself.

Flight Officer—A.A.F.

PLEASE NOTE THIS CHANGE IN BLUE BOOK PUBLICATION DATES

Many years ago **BLUE BOOK**, in common with other monthly magazines, kept advancing its publication date to a point where for a long time it has been a full month ahead of the date appearing on the cover. This practice has led to confusion on the part of our readers, our contributors and our newsdealers.

BLUE BOOK's publication dates are therefore being changed. Our May issue will appear on April 21st, instead of the end of March. Beginning with our June issue, each number of **BLUE BOOK** will appear on the Wednesday or Friday immediately preceding the first of the month shown on the cover.

(LOOK FOR YOUR NEXT [MAY]
ISSUE OF BLUE BOOK ON WED-
NESDAY, APRIL 21st.)

A colorful firsthand picture of the bitter fighting on this strange and remote battlefield.

BATTLE *for the*

CHAPTER TWO

SKY ROAD AND SEA ROAD

IN A UNITED STATES ARMY FLYING FORTRESS EN ROUTE TO THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

EVEN going up to the line is different in this war. There were some Army girls and Army wives standing around the plane, back there in Oahu, Hawaii, a lot of blue water ago. The plane had five Jap flags painted on it, meaning five Zeros made naught, and had guns sticking out all over it like quills on a poked-up porcupine, but with the girls there it didn't seem too much like business.

The girls' bright, pretty dresses were blown out stiff behind them by the wind. Their hair was blowing backward, too. They were giggling and flossing around and the whole thing, with that blue Hawaiian sky over it and the thick yellow sunlight coloring it, didn't look like going up to the front line at all, but like something in a magazine. There were even two low-hung roadsters in the background to complete the picture. . . .

There was a whole silvery chorus of soprano good-bye's as we climbed into the plane and suddenly one of the Army wives there, a real pretty-looking young girl, cried out, "Bring back my husband!" Everybody smiled at her encouragingly. "Safe," she said. I looked at her closely for the first time. Her whole face seemed drawn into a point and was gray and sick-looking.

Her husband, a bomber pilot in the same squadron as these boys, had been rumored down somewhere in the Pacific after a tussle with warships off the Solomons. Then he had been officially reported missing in action. . . . A few days ago, he had been rumored picked up, and last night still another rumor reached Honolulu that it wasn't he who had been picked up but some Navy fellows. . . .

When the story of this sky and sea road is told, after the war has been won, the chances are pretty good it will come out as one of the most extraordinary achievements in a very extraordinary war indeed. The part of it I saw was strictly an Army job, but I am told that other parts of it are feathers in the caps of the Marines and the Navy. The road was punched through under forced draft by men heedless as ants working on the edge of the vast catastrophe that smote the Eastern Pacific and is still perking there bloodily. It's a "this far and no further" line drawn around the well-fanged Jap where he has bit into the toothsome Pacific, and it is hoped the line will one day turn into a strangler's cord around his neck.

The part of it we see as we sit down at night and hop off at dawn consists of the kind of islands which, much to the bewilderment of the fellows now there, people used to throw off their wives for and dream about in the old days of, say, 1938. Some of the islands look like those in the comical cartoons about castaways. Others are populated sparsely by peculiar folks whose cannibalism and head-hunting antics and scanty hipwear form the current legends of the new A.E.F. A vast crawl of traffic buzzes this way and that way, making some of the places look a little like a beach resort road on a peacetime holiday. The fellows on the islands are something like traffic cops at Reuben's Junction. But, whatever the traffic, the islands still remain that kind the cartoonists draw with a black line around white space—bleached and shrunken rocks, a mile or a few miles long and less than that wide, unequipped with anybody's favorite movie star or anybody's ten favorite books.

The uniformed "castaways" stationed on these islands have one of the rugged jobs of the war. They know that, if the Japs want to get anywhere—and it seems to be a habit of theirs to try—they will have to hit them first. When such a time comes, as, for instance, it came to the Japs who had the same job on Makin Island, then these fellows will have to drop their job of directing traffic and take what the Japs give and hold on with whatever they've got until help comes from maybe as far as a thousand miles away.

But that's only part of their troubles. Another part is what may be described as an "interesting sociological experiment." This is the first time ever that large bodies of men have been snatched up out of civilization and dropped on rocks in the middle of a watered-over wasteland to live and work there, cut off from the world, in tropical heat and in a loneliness that cannot be imagined. . . .

On islands where there are natives, the fellows have a better time of it. They do what the natives do in the way of handicraft with palm leaves and shells and this and that, and it seems to be true that, wherever Americans are, the "natives" like them. There is not going to be any repetition of British experiences in Burma on these islands, because the American boys squat right down with the people and teach them what they know and learn what the natives know.

There is a native colony on one of the islands made up of men and a few of their wives who beat it out of the Gilbert Islands in canoes because the Japs were paying them off for their work in funny-looking money. A sergeant, whose name I dare not mention because his family must not know where he is, that being a military secret, took me down to see them. "Seet don!" the brown-skinned boys shouted when I came in, and I found there was no room to sit because the soldiers had taken up all the space. They were exchanging information in a weird pidgin English about the best way of stringing cloth out of grass. After a while, somebody produced a ukulele and one of the blacks produced a love song out of that apologetic instrument that had everybody thinking of his girl back in Brooklyn or Dayton, Ohio.

One of the reasons why this remarkable route must be written about thus vaguely and inconclusively is the camouflage job Army engineers have done along it. Nothing is what it seems, even from heights of a few hundred feet. Runways have been made practically invisible from any place. Hard-surfaced roads do not exist for the human eye perched aloft unless a truck comes along to point them out. As for hangars, depots, barracks, entrenchments, bunkers, and clubhouses, you have to fall over them to find them, even in daylight. . . .

Anybody who has ever been to the movies has had several good times crying over a scene where dashing young aviators descend on a smacked-up buddy in a hospital and cheer him up in a way that is rough and manly, but nevertheless shows the hearts of gold beating tenderly underneath. Well, this is the way such a scene works out in real life.

The wounded pilot was Lieutenant James Lancaster of Temple, Texas, and his buddies were the officers of the crew with whom I am flying to the Solomons—Pilot Lieutenant Ed Loberg of Tigerton, Wisconsin, Co-Pilot Lieutenant B. Thurston of Indianapolis, Navigator Lieutenant

HIGHLIGHTS of the NEW BOOKS

SOLOMONS by Ira Wolfert

R. D. Spitzer of Anderson, Indiana, and Bombardier Lieutenant Robert A. Mitchell of Washington, D. C. They found out by accident at one of those islands around here that "Lank," as they call him, was among some beautiful nurses near by, hopping around on crutches and hollering to get back with his squadron. "Ah doan' lak this here pee-ure life," he had been hollering to all the nurses. "Let me back in the war." And all the nurses thought he was cute.

"Did you hear about Si?" Lank asked, referring to Lieutenant Sidney I. Dardan of Waco, Texas. Nobody had heard. "Well, he sat down on the water a day after I got mine and was in here to tell me about it. They had two or three minutes before the plane sank and all nine of them stood there by the radio hatch throwing things into the raft. They had only the one raft. The other one was folded up somewhere in the muck below.

"They kept pitching. Boy, how they pitched! Chocolate, peanut bars, ham sandwiches, fruit, pillows, blankets, enough to make that raft some kind of a damned yacht or something. Real cushy. Then they pile into the raft themselves and what do they find but they are going straight down. The raft has a big hole in the bottom of it and all the stuff they've been throwing into it just kept right on going straight to the bottom. So there they are, not in a yacht at all but riding the Pacific bareback."

Lancaster laughed uproariously and everybody here laughed until the tears ran out. Then somebody said, "I guess it wasn't very funny for Si."

"I guess not," said Lancaster and laughed again, thinking of those nine surprised faces in the dark there. Then he quieted down. "There were nine of them in this one raft, made for five midgets on a diet. They had no place to sit and nothing to eat or drink or anything and were in it for seven days, before being picked up by the Navy. Sharks followed them all the time and they'd shoot every one that tried to come up through the hole in the bottom.

"One of the fellows died of exposure.

"The Navy ship that picked the boys up had a real ice-cream bar on it."

"Pretty soft," somebody said, and somebody else demanded of Lank what he meant by getting shot and letting down his public that way. Lank wanted to know what public. When he heard that the newspapers and radio had made a hero of him for shooting down a four-motored Japanese flying boat in three minutes, he kept saying, "Oh, that; oh, shucks, that one," and blushing with pleasure. Then he told how he had got his, up Bougainville way.

"We ran into some Zeros," said Lancaster. "One was high up, setting himself for a dive, and the boys at the guns poured it on him. It was the prettiest sight I ever saw, those tracers going into him like red pepper into an egg. He started to whup from side to side—you know that seesaw they get on before falling—and I thought, 'Well, pal, good-bye,' and swung in under him to get on with the bombing when whop! Something like a horse kicked me in the leg.

"It was just a little old bitty .707 (about the size of our thirty-caliber bullets) but it knocked my foot off the controls and I felt awful foolish because I just couldn't get my foot back where it belonged. Well, that was all there was to it."

This morning we said good-bye to Lank in a way the movies would approve. We buzzed past the hospital real low twice. Lank, a tall, whippy-looking lad, was standing out front watching us, and as we passed he lifted one crutch straight up into the air to salute us.

This is being written on a case of hand grenades on a jungle airport on the edge of the business. The fellows with whom I have been going up to the line have got there. Tomorrow they go to work. In the meantime, one of them is reading two-month-old funnies. Another is playing poker. Others are shooting the breeze. . . .

CHAPTER THREE

THE LOSS OF THE WASP

THE aircraft carrier *Wasp* had bad luck, and in waters outside of here ran head-on into one of those rotten twists of happenstance that turn up during war. About three o'clock on a clear, tranquil, sunlit afternoon, it took three torpedoes from a submarine. It was built to take three times that many without blanching, but the first one nosed into a bomb that blew blazes all over everywhere. The second tin fish swam clear through. After that, the third one did not matter. . . .

The *Wasp* died a lingering death, burning for hours with vast, blazing spewings, like the mouth of war itself opened wide. . . . In the end, United States destroyers reluctantly had to give the *coup de grâce* with torpedoes.

The loss of life on the *Wasp* was comparatively light, considering the way its luck was running, and it was reduced by the heroism of the men aboard; heroism which, judging by the conduct of the Navy in this greatest and most prolonged naval battle in history, seems to be as much a part of the standard equipment of our fellows as the dog-tags they wear around their necks. A substantial ingredient of heroism is the ability to keep thinking in the face of disaster and to conquer the instinct of self-preservation and never to let go of anything until the experts command otherwise. A *Wasp* survivor story that best illustrates this feature of the United States Navy is told by Ensign John Jenks Mitchell, twenty-two-year-old Annapolis graduate from Washington, D. C. As his shipmates put it, Mitchell established a new world's record for an involuntary high jump by getting himself blown thirty feet high and sixty feet away. The record for a survivor in the last war was believed to have been thirty feet high and a few feet away.

Ensign Mitchell is now convalescing very nicely here from a broken leg. His major distress seems to be that the broken leg temporarily is preventing him from passing the physical examination necessary before receiving a promotion to lieutenant (j.g.) which he has been given.

Mitchell described his experience with considerable unilateral amusement to an array of shocked faces, one of them belonging to his brother, Second Lieutenant Robert A. Mitchell, a bombardier on a Flying Fortress which figured in the Battle of Midway, softened up the path for the Marines at Guadalcanal, and is now working over Bougainville. The other faces belonged to Lieutenant Mitchell's plane mates.

"I am somewhat ashamed of my story," said Ensign Mitchell. "As far as I am concerned, it consisted of a loud, unruly noise—something like a railroad train going up a flight of stairs—and the next thing I knew, it was ten days later and I wanted a cigarette. My friends here have

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told me what I did and saw during those ten days. In fact, this ward has been something like a fraternity house on the morning after the night before, each man telling the other what he did while under the influence of—say, high explosives.

"General quarters had been on all day and I had just been relieved when a seaman in the crew of my gun station said in a somewhat unseamanlike way, 'Mr. Mitchell, what's 'at funny-looking thing out there?'"

"It was a torpedo wake. I sounded an alarm in a voice that may be described as similar to a thrilled tenor, for the torpedo was coming in right under my feet. I remember that the *Wasp* started to turn, but being a careful sort of man, the next thing that happened I was going hastily toward the bridge. The torpedo influenced my decision. It came in under my feet apparently, although my vision may have been prejudiced, close enough to peel the soles off my shoes. It missed my shoes but hit the bomb I was standing over.

"They tell me I landed right at the feet of my superior officers on the bridge in a posture unbecoming even an ensign, being flat on my back."

Ensign Mitchell laughed heartily and Lieutenant Mitchell, who has been in several battles against the Japs with his kid brother, but was seeing him now in a quiet, clean little officers' ward near here for the first time in two years, joined uncertainly in the merriment.

The bridge, it developed, was from twenty-five to thirty-five feet above and exactly sixty feet away from where Ensign Mitchell had been standing when he was blown up. In disclosing this fact, Ensign Mitchell laughed uproariously again and said, "In fact, I am thinking of putting in my chit to qualify for landings on the flight deck." Then becoming serious, he added in a low tone: "I guess God had His hand on my shoulder that time. I started for the pearly gates but He stopped me in midair." As far as can be learned here, Ensign Mitchell is the sole survivor of his gun-crew.

After that, another remarkable thing happened to keep Ensign Mitchell alive. In the condition in which he landed there was considerable evidence to indicate that he was dead. But even in the awful circumstances then shaping up over the whole ship, the Navy refused to let one of their own be marked off for the Japs until the experts called the score. The experts were far from the bridge at the time, so Lieutenant Courtney Shands, who is now a few beds away and looking in very good shape, and Commander Beakley strapped the ensign to a stretcher. Then Lieutenant Shands dropped down to the explosive murk below where airplanes and their ammunition were popping like balloons on New Year's Eve and dug a raft from an airplane for the unconscious boy. The ensign was lowered carefully to the calm sea. But the raft was top-heavy and it turned over, leaving its occupant tightly secured under some half-dozen feet of water. The sea was full of sharks which were attracted by the bloody gruel of bodies, and everybody in it was under great temptation to make tracks away from there. But Lieutenant Robert Slye struggled with the raft until he righted it, pausing every now and then to thrash at the sharks with his feet.

CHAPTER FOUR

SLUGGING IT OUT

GUADALCANAL, SOLOMON ISLANDS

THIS is no banana war going on in the Solomons, involving potting hopped-up Japanese killers from trees, but the fightingest engagement involving American troops since Bataan.

The reason for the necessity of victory after victory for the Americans holding a spot of land on one-hundred-mile-long Guadalcanal is that the Japs keep on sneaking men and guns into remote places, accumulate a striking force in the jungles, and then hit with it.

The Japs were pretty well convinced by their parade down the Pacific that islands were impossible militarily to hold. Our strategists, trying a stepping-stone route to Tokyo, are out to convince the Japanese that islands are impossible militarily to hold only for them.

The prolonged Japanese effort to break off our toe-hold in the Solomons is continuing today in a now tragically familiar tempo. The Japs are paying dearly for their sudden access of ambition, but presenting a bill and collecting it is no picnic.

Twenty-two Japanese high-level bombers overtured the present show with thousand-pound crumps, starting a few minutes after noon yesterday, October 13. Marine anti-aircraft gunners laid a perfect pattern under this flight which would have knocked down every plane in it except that the shells blew up exasperatingly just two thousand feet under the targets.

A second wave of Jap bombers came over two hours later. At least three of these came down in smoke and burst against the earth like Roman candles.

About eleven o'clock last night the enemy began a concentrated bombardment which the Marines, many of them veterans of Pearl Harbor, declare was the heaviest bombardment of the war for them. It was apparently conducted by Jap battleships with blinky-eyed gunners, since fourteen- and sixteen-inch guns threw salvo after salvo toward Henderson Airport without doing much more than dig excellent foxholes for future use in the mellow black earth around it.

The bombardment was lifted shortly before dawn and tension relaxed in our foxholes when—wham!—Japanese field artillery opened up on our positions from near-by hills. This is what is happening now. Our artillery is barking back throatily, pausing only when our dive-bombers get over the target.

We are using mostly pursuit planes for dive-bombing. The planes take off in the face of very accurate fire, skittering along the runway with dust kicking at the wheels and giving them an extra lift into the air. The pilots find the Jap batteries by aiming their noses into the shells spewing from them. A particularly annoying battery was silenced by a pursuit pilot who came in with a screaming dive, found the enemy's fire missing him, climbed steeply thousands of feet, then turned and slammed himself down directly into the mouths of the guns, from which, a flicker later, a deathlike silence ensued.

For obscure reasons known only to Fate, this plane escaped damage and was cheered to a safe landing. Every man on Guadalcanal was ready to give this pilot a medal, or, what's more useful, a glass of cold water.

While this was going on, our ground troops were girding up the bloody beaches and hills, as a Jap naval task force, including at least five transports, was reported nearing the island. Army bombers are hunting them now, loaded with a foretaste of what is awaiting them if they get through.

During the night the fighting guts of our men were brightly illuminated by the glare of flares and bursting shells in a genuinely nasty bombardment. Our men, crouching face down in foxholes, heard a boom-boom first, then silence, then felt the earth tremble all around. The earth shook like a hammered gong and then the black sky was filled with wild, wailing shells. After that came a vast blast and frequently the snakelike slither of shrapnel plowing huge furrows in the earth. Pieces of shrapnel weighing more than eighteen pounds were found in the fields this morning.

This terrible, passionate symphony of war went on for more than two hundred and forty minutes, each one brain-

smothering, but the dawn's light revealed unbelievably few casualties. Each man had his own story to tell of a narrow escape. Some men did not have time to reach fox-holes and lay between logs, under leaves, or tried to dig into the earth with their own noses and chests.

Three enlisted men in a bomber crew lay face down on the earth with arms around each other. When a shell burst directly overhead and the awful slither of shrapnel ceased, all three laughed and agreed a miss is as good as a mile. A moment later the man in the middle said in a faint voice: "I think I am hit. I cannot feel my back." Shrapnel had broken his back without touching the men on either side of him.

A Signal Corps man at a switchboard running to the front-line trenches remained at his post throughout and, evidently to relieve his nerves, began broadcasting by telephone a blow-by-blow description of the bombardment to the fellows lying in. He could see the muzzle-flashes from where he was located. "Here comes a good one!" he would cry. "These are short." Suddenly his voice became as ecstatic as if a blonde mermaid had come waltzing from the sea. "Boy, here comes a peach!" he exclaimed. Which was a bit too thick for the fellows out in it. A whole chorus of profane baritone bawling rose from all over everywhere in the seething blackness. The general tenor of the remarks was expressed pithily in what sounded like very good Bostonese: "Shut that man off! He's making so much noise I can't sleep." . . .

Artillery from ships and on land and aerial bombs called the tune of the battle of the Solomons in day and night fighting, October 14 and 15, with the Japanese and American forces slugging it out toe to toe.

A Jap naval task force battered through into the mouth of our positions, leaving a long, crimson trail of dead and dying men and burning, listing, and foundering ships stretched out for miles to sea. Japanese troops scuttled up the beach under a blasting barrage and disappeared into the trees, where they are now trying to form under fire from United States Marines and Army infantry.

The Army infantrymen are getting their first taste of hot steel and seem anxious to prove that they are as tough as the Marines. A measure of their mettle is the fact that some two hundred stowaways are reported to have stuffed themselves into nooks and crannies aboard the Army transports, technically deserting their companies in order to hook up with outfits going into action. These men do not know whether medals or courts-martial face them and are not particularly concerned about that now, that being a remote bridge to cross. . . .

CHAPTER SEVEN

BATTLE IN THREE DIMENSIONS

FROM A BASE IN THE GUADALCANAL SECTOR

THE fourth battle of the Solomons, which gave Admiral Halsey his baptism of fire as Commander of the South Pacific Force, was actually a development of the third and followed hard upon its heels. The week of lull in between was an uneasy lull, the Jap remaining in touch with us. At least he kept trying to touch us with his high-explosives encased in bombs and shells and succeeded as often as he failed.

This fourth battle was typical of all the battles the Jap has fought to regain the Solomons and, for that reason among others, will be described here in detail.

The battle was fought over an area of two hundred and fifty thousand square miles, the bulk of it covered with water, and lasted five days and five nights. These days were as fierce, bloody, and uncertain as all days of pitched battle are.

As far as this reporter can determine with his limited knowledge and the limited view he was able to get from

"Battle for the Solomons," by Ira Wolfert

a fast-moving seat in the arena itself, this battle was a work of considerable art on our part in strategy and tactics. Certainly it had in it all the chaos and tragedy and exultant soarings above tragedy of all works of great art.

Our side wrote the story. The Jap supplied terrible chapters in it, but we were in charge almost all the way through and in charge of the ending. The ending of the battle was that the Jap failed to achieve his objective.

In addition to all their other difficulties, both sides raced the weather. Nature entered the arena with a front of its own, a black and storming pile of weather which is known even technically as a front. This front, like something created by Thomas Hardy, began advancing upon the battle area as the Jap fleet steamed out for action. Meteorologists, or, as they are called here, weather officers, charted it anxiously. It had a long way to go, but it sent speeding out ahead of it scouts, points, screens, and spearheads in the shape of squalls and cloudbursts, Nature's main force following on behind.

Then men, standing up tall to this eruption of Nature, used it to conceal their maneuverings at first. But on the fifth day in the early hours of the present morning, Tuesday, October 27 (Monday, October 26 in New York), Nature's front took charge of the arena and set it boiling with a fury of its own. Admiral Halsey is known to his men here as a "rough brush." But not even a rough brush can sweep such a storm as this one out of men's eyes, and in the blackened day that is now following the black night, nobody, not even the tallest man, can see anything it would be useful to kill.

At the moment this is written, the various American staffs engaged in the battle are trying to add up thousands of eyewitness reports and determine how roughly the Jap was handled in his fourth effort to throw us out of Guadalcanal. When they have arrived at the score, they will radio the news home and a communiqué will be given out, which you will have read long before you can read this.

For reasons which are not only irritating, but seem unnecessary, the Navy denies the press here any access to rapid communications and so handicaps it seriously in its war job of helping to wake up our people to the fact that we are not going to start to fight when we get ready, but are fighting now, bloodily and desperately.

I don't know whether this dispatch will reach you in a week or two or three months or even whether it ever will reach you, but I do know, having been on the mainland and out of the war as recently as last September, that people cannot be stirred by facts as old as these will be by the time they reach print, and cannot get any sense of continuing pressure on their emotions unless there is daily communication between them and the battlefield.

I had no idea until I got here that a war was going on in this sector—the only serious-minded war the Japs are fighting anywhere in the world at present—and that shots were being exchanged daily and men were being killed and wounded daily. And that, for instance, the handful of Flying Fortresses engaged in this area have had exactly one day since July 31 when no enemy contact was made and no job of bloodying him up or getting bloodied up was done, and that our Navy has been in action during the same period with the same, if not greater, intensity. I had no idea of this because the press, where I am accustomed to getting my impressions of what's going on in the world, was not allowed any means of telling the story.

And, to tell the truth about it, this dispatch is being written by a reporter who has a story to tell and feels that telling the story would be useful to his country's effort to win the war and can't think of anything to do under the existing circumstances but tell it, even though he will have to trust to luck to get it to where it can be heard at a time when people will still be interested in hearing it.

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This morning, in the midst of a widespread storm which will last several days, the Jap fleet broke off the engagement with ours and withdrew to its bristling fortresses in the North where we are not yet prepared to follow. The Japanese land forces on Guadalcanal, who had been trying to drive the Marines and Army infantry out of their way with everything they had, including fourteen-ton tanks and bayonets, and had succeeded in making something like a break-through, have now retired to positions where there is no point in our paying the cost of following them.

There is no point in following them because they are now relatively harmless without reinforcements and will die peacefully of starvation, as a cohesive army at any rate, if their sea lines of communication are kept broken. The Jap land forces lost nine tanks in the battle and approximately twenty-one times as many men as we did and have retreated to territory that we have no use for.

It must be remembered that the fight for Guadalcanal is not for the hundred-mile island, but for the air facilities on the one tip of it and the sea roads leading there. Those air facilities are useful to the Jap as a base for operations southward and to us as a base for operations northward.

We hold the ground and continue to hold it against ceaseless pressure by the Jap. In the sense that the Jap has not pushed us back and that we have denied the Jap a base there, we have won a whole series of battles for Guadalcanal thus far. But we have not yet won a victory there. For, while the Jap no longer has a base there, neither have we been able to make a base out of it. Guadalcanal is not a base at all, but a battlefield.

We are winning in the Solomons in another sense too. The Guadalcanal area has become a kind of Verdun, a maw into which the Jap is pouring his power and giving us a chance to blunt it. This is not a nickel-and-dime operation for the Jap. In the last five days here, he has lost somewhere about three hundred planes. That's not a filibustering expedition. That's a battle.

In the whole Solomons operation thus far, the Jap has lost about fifteen times as much in ships, planes, and trained men—the best men he has—as in the battle of Midway where he was denied decisively access to the Eastern Pacific. In a war against a producing unit as inferior as Japan's is believed to be, attrition is a weighty factor. The Jap is throwing planes from his factories into battle. One of the prisoners taken here recently is a twelve-year-old boy who shipped as a sailor on a patrol vessel. That might mean anything you make it mean, but it can also mean that the Jap's manpower is beginning to spread thin over the immense area he has conquered. . . .

Jap losses were much greater than ours. There is a conclusive reason for believing this, but I am not allowed to cite it. Damage has been done to two Jap carriers, one Jap battleship, three of their heavy cruisers. Nobody has had time to count up the destroyers yet, they being only \$4,000,000 or \$5,000,000 engines of destruction, and therefore comparatively unimportant.

What is believed to be the best and biggest carrier the Japs have is known to have suffered four direct hits with heavy bombs. Naval gunfire, in revenge for United States Navy Torpedo Squadron 8, which sank a Jap carrier at Midway and came out with one survivor, wiped out a whole squadron of Japanese torpedo planes before one of them could get close enough to the target to release a torpedo. Japanese Imperial Marines and infantry left at least two thousand of their dead behind for us to bury at Guadalcanal.

The fourth battle of the Solomons was a naval battle, but like most of the engagements in this prolonged and by all odds most curious war between navies in history, surface vessels did not figure in it vitally except as defenders of the pivots from which blows were swung. Air-

planes were the striking weapons, carriers the pivots from which the strike was launched, and another of the pivots was the land on the northeast edge of Guadalcanal, where the Japs and our forces slashed and blasted at each other over treacherous terrain with tanks, artillery, and, finally, bayonets.

In the third battle of the Solomons, which ended a week ago, the Japs had forced a landing on Guadalcanal of troops and supplies. They had come in with five transports and a protecting screen of warships. Our planes had vaulted over this screen and sunk three of the transports, but at least two had got through. Then, apparently to spare their surface vessels further punishment and give their newly landed forces a chance to pull themselves together, the screen of Jap warships withdrew, one of the battleships in the force limping awkwardly.

The landing had been made very close to our positions, either because the Japs have no communications through the hundred miles of jungle and eight-thousand-foot mountains from the western end of the island (which is theirs) or because they intended at the time to fight from their ships as we did when we occupied the island.

After the landing, the Jap foot forces and tanks withdrew from contact with our troops and the nervous business of sending out feelers in small squads and larger patrols began and endured for exactly a week. How nervous this business was is indicated by a Marine I spoke to in the hospital here. He was on sentry duty on the beach. The duty seemed long to him, and after a few minutes of it he began to sing to keep himself company. On the third or fourth bar, as he remembers, of "St. Louis Blues," he was shot in the groin by a Jap sniper and had to remain silent until his relief crawled up and found him. "If I had hollered out," he said, "the other fellows would have come to help me and they'd have got it." This happened on Wednesday evening, October 21, during the "lull" deep in American territory.

Then two powerful Jap task forces put to sea and began to converge on Guadalcanal. One force came down from the northwest, from the bases in Bougainville, Rabaul, and perhaps Yap. The other force, spread over several hundred miles, came down from the northeast, apparently from Jap bases in the Carolinas, the Gilberts, and Marshalls. At the same time, the Jap land forces on Guadalcanal began to move.

THE objective of this concerted move was easy to detect—the reduction of Guadalcanal. But their tactic, which had to be read by our staff officers from the flickering impressions received by aviators hurtling through the fog of war and the spearheads of weather Nature's front was throwing out, was more difficult to interpret.

This reporter has not been made privy to staff deliberations, but he saw the lights burning and the faces paling with thought. And, from a portion of the information available to the staffs and from subsequent events, a guess can be made that the Japs were intending to use their carriers to give air support to their land forces and break down our own fleet, so that their surface ships could come in close and give artillery support to the same land forces with their big guns.

Apparently, too, the task force coming down from the northwest was only making a feint, even though a very forceful one, while the task force coming down from the northeast was the business. Anyway, this was the task force we elected to hit hardest, jabbing with the left hand and throwing Sunday punches with the right hand. And our staff seems to have come to the right decision because the Japs failed of their objective.

The first intimation we here had that a full-scale battle was in the making was when the Japs stepped up the tempo of their pepperings of the area. On Friday, October 23, the air raids on the airport at Guadalcanal began to take on the lead-based complexion of a blitz.

In one raid there, sixteen Jap bombers came over with a support of twenty Zeros. Grumman fighter planes (and, naturally, their youthful pilots) shot down all twenty of the Zeros and got one bomber certainly, three probably, without losing a single plane or pilot. On the same day, two Jap destroyers sneaked in close in broad daylight, threw shells at our men, and ran away safely. This need not be taken as any reflection on the alertness of our forces. Those fellows are fighting for their lives and are alert. But when fighting surface ships and bombers with fighter planes, the problem is of gasoline and when to expend it. Fighter planes carry a limited supply of gasoline and the Japs, who are no slouches at timing, got in such blows as they did when our planes were on the ground being refueled.

Throughout Saturday, October 24, weather was flocking in on the battle area and piling up, and the Japs played a vast cat-and-mouse game with our forces, they hiding under the weather, we scuttling and beetling through it in an effort to locate them and determine what they were up to. The day was given over to the land fighting on Guadalcanal and to clashes between searching planes who shot each other down when cornered or when stumbling on an easy kill.

Sunday was a day which did not seem at all like Sunday here. Early in the morning, First Lieutenant Mario Sesso, flying an Army Flying Fortress (he can't decide whether to call his plane "The Bronx Bomber" or "The Bronx Bird") on a search mission, happened through a break in the clouds below which a sizable Jap force lay. The whole battlefield began instantly to twitch with radio messages and in a very little while to erupt with the full, awful force of war, continuing without intermission until the Japs decided they could afford no more and withdrew.

Finding an enemy fleet is a hazardous occupation for an aviator. He not only has to find it, but stay with it while it is trying to knock him down. The PBY pilot who tipped off the Midway explosion summed up his whole enterprise by radioing his superiors the position of the Jap ships and their number and nature and direction, and then added poignantly, "Please notify my next of kin." Incidentally, he was overpessimistic, for he lived through his experience.

The final, most violent phase of the battle hit first at the bull shoulders of the Flying Fortress Lieutenant Sesso was flying. A swarm of Zeros came buzzing after him to shoot him down so that he could not continue to radio back the course changes the Jap ships were making to throw off pursuit.

Lieutenant Sesso played hide-and-seek with the Zeros in the clouds, but he had to come out every so often to keep an eye on the ships. The first time he came out, a Zero was right in front of his nose and facing him. His bombardier, Sergeant Eldon M. Elliott of Idalia, Colorado, flying his first combat mission and doomed to die young, fired into the Zero at the same moment the Zero fired into the Fort. The bullets crossed over each other in the air. Sergeant Elliott's bullets blew up the Zero and it shucked out its dead pilot and fell in pieces. One of the Zero's bullets hit Sergeant Elliott in the heart and he was dead before he could fall backward into his chair. In the next hour, Lieutenant Sesso saw two more Zeros fall away from him, smoking. They are counted as probables because he had not the time to watch them hit the sea.

The business of finding enemy surface forces and sticking with them until your side could come up in strength and do some good went on continually during the days and nights of the fourth battle of the Solomons. The Jap forces, as they entered the arena, and ours, too, split up into something like little floating pillboxes, separated and deployed in what they hoped would be an impregnable manner. They kept shifting position continually while edging in the general direction of their objective and each new position had to be discovered and attacked.

The last covey of Jap ships was discovered at midnight Monday night by a Navy plane piloted by Lieutenant D. L. ("Jake") Jackson of Freeport, Long Island. After lingering on the scene for an hour to give his support a chance to start on up after him, Lieutenant Jackson made a torpedo run on the carrier in this force. Torpedo planes are thought to have a modest chance of survival only when a concerted attack is made on all quarters of a ship at once in combination with dive-bombers, all together dividing the fire of the ship so that the attack may be pressed home and some of the attackers can remain alive through it.

Lieutenant Jackson, a blond, soft-voiced young man with a soft skin all pinked over by youth, and his crew understood this very well, but they elected to make the run all by themselves, anyway. They had been in battle for five days by then.

Torpedo runs have to be made at suicidally low speeds because aerial torpedoes are delicate instruments and flop over when dropped too fast or from too high an altitude. Lieutenant Jackson made his run at a hundred and twenty miles an hour about thirty feet over the water. He gave the enemy a square shake at a target for a very, very long time. Every gun in the force was fired at him. The big cannons were fired into the water to throw up splashes and wreck him. His intended victim kept making violent turns to evade him. But he continued steadily through the maelstrom, dropped his torpedo when about four hundred feet away from his target, saw the torpedo land with a soft squash in the black water and proceed correctly on its way, and, as he turned, heard the noise which told him his torpedo had arrived at its proper destination.

Japanese and American search planes swarmed over the whole 250,000 square miles of battle area. They were threads, twitching and curling and connecting the various centers of battle on the sea.

In the meantime, land fighting was proceeding as dolorously for the Japanese as sea fighting. Their Imperial Marines and infantry were working their way forward slowly. Small fleets of planes would dart in from the sea to help them. Occasionally, a few Jap warships would break away from the furious banging our Navy was subjecting them to and come close enough to Guadalcanal to help their troops with big guns.

Well, that, roughly and on the surface, is what the battle looked like—a corner of it given over to "better 'ole" land fighting between men on foot or on armored wheels; relatively small patches of sea lashed volcanically by bombs, shells, and bullets; the whole stitched together by search planes, patrol boats, and submarines, and buttressed by land and sea bases for services of supply and maintenance.

And into this whole churned-up segment of the world, Nature poured its own fury of winds and rains.

ONLY hints of the battle-rage with which our young men fought can be given by a single reporter.

The Navy vessel which took revenge for Torpedo Squadron 8 (wiped out by the Japs at Midway) was subjected at the time of its moment of triumph to a concerted attack from a squadron of dive-bombers. The Japs were out to kill. Their torpedo planes came in on all quarters and blew up in the distance like human bombs throwing themselves against barbed wire. Their dive-bombers dove on all quarters. Some of these blew up in midair with their own bombs, but most plummeted blazing straight down into the sea, falling like a rain of fire all round the ship. The Japs scored no hits at all in that attack, but they came back again and again, and finally hit the ship so hard it had to be sunk.

A Navy dive-bomber squadron out to get a Jap carrier was under the desperate assaults of a great mass of Zeros

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for the last twenty minutes of its approach to the target. Our rear gunners shot down fifteen Zeros in this approach, killing expensively armored Japs at a rate of one every eighty seconds. The Zeros were of Varsity caliber. They were off the best existing carrier the Japs are known to have. They realized that if our squadron landed its wallop, they would die, anyway, having no place to land, so when our bombers peeled off for their dive, the Zeros followed them right on down into the withering fire from their own carrier. Our tail gunners kept shooting at Jap planes all through the dive while reporting altitude to the pilots (so that they wouldn't dive too low and hit the sea). Eighty per cent of the planes in this squadron got direct hits on the carrier. The carrier shot down more of its own planes than it did of ours, for the simple reason that there were more of theirs in the line of fire.

This particular attack was led by Lieutenant W. J. Widhelm, who got from his experience the longest view to date obtained by an American of a Japanese fleet after it had been struck by us.

Widhelm was shot down during his approach to the Jap carrier and was picked up at sea and returned safely here two days later. During his approach to the Jap fleet, Widhelm said that a Zero made a head-on run into him. He set his sights on the Zero's cowlings, pressed the trigger and held it. The Zero ran right into Widhelm's tracer bullets, bounced straight up like a ball that is hit on the nose, and flipped over on its back, belching smoke, and fell, burning, into the sea.

Another Zero tried exactly the same attack and it was like a movie film being run over again, this Zero also bounding into the air like a ball batted on the nose and falling, burning, into the sea. Then a third Zero came along, but this one cagily looped back and forth over Widhelm's head out of range of his guns. It lingered that way for a moment, like a balked hawk hovering about, until a fourth Zero came in on Widhelm's level, then it dove straight down on him, shooting plenty of trouble into Widhelm's motor.

Widhelm, leading a formation of bombers, tried to keep in position with a broken oil line and a smoking motor, but was slowed down so much that those behind him had to break up the formation to stay in back of him. Widhelm gave up in his effort to drop his bombs on the Jap carrier and tried to make his home base, but finally had to land on the sea.

He could not get his flaps down and had to make a dead-stick landing, which is very rough business, particularly for a land plane, but the plane refrained from cracking up and Lieutenant Widhelm and Radioman Stokely were able to get out a life raft, furnish it tastefully with parachute kits and practically all the comforts of home—except water. This occurred about 11 A.M. Monday. Just before hitting the water, Lieutenant Widhelm saw the Jap carrier burning, but after he had got his raft set up it had disappeared beyond the horizon.

Navy Lieutenant Atwell, piloting one of those awkward, clumsy PBY's, supposed to be useful only for search, made a dive-bombing attack on a Jap heavy cruiser at an angle of between fifty and sixty degrees. This the Navy rates as true dive-bombing, calling the kind of dives the Germans make glide-bombing.

Lieutenant Atwell, an enlisted man up from the ranks and out to show why, scored one direct hit on the cruiser just aft of the smokestack, which is the place to hit those babies and destroy them. He came so close as he dropped down on his target that the debris from the bursting ship riddled his plane, splashes from near misses filled the whole tail of his plane with water, and the concussions from his own bombs blew up a flashlight one of the crew happened to be holding in his hands. This small, strange

explosion, probably caused by the air pressure inside the flashlight being greater than the air pressure outside, caused the only wounds suffered by Americans in the attack.

A striking force of Army Flying Fortresses was sent out after a heavy cruiser. They attacked in two formations, one close behind the other. As they began their bombing runs, their intended victim started turning in a 360-degree circle. They found him in a placid sea and his wake gushed out behind him like a squeal of terror from an animal running faster than its own sound.

The Jap had almost completed a full circle when the first formation dropped its bombs. The tail gunners in this formation were beginning to fill their mouths with curses because only one bomb made a direct hit and that one landed on the bow. "I already had the words in my mouth and could taste them there," one of them said. But before any words could be uttered, the second formation hit and bombs raked the cruiser from bow to stern. The heavy ship seemed to leap up into the air and then settle into a yielding cushion of sea, belching infernos of flame from every wound. When the Fortresses landed, about two hours later, the men went to mess with the look in their eyes of those who have seen an incredible sight.

Jap land fighting was both good and bad. Their Army was bad, their Imperial Marines very good at everything except the bayonet. During these bloody days, Japanese infantry made charges that were pathetic. The tiny figure of a Japanese officer would rise up from the torn earth far away and wave a sword. Clusters of little men, all huddled together, would rise up after him and come forward, stooping over into our machine-gun bullets and falling down dead or wounded in them.

The Imperial Marines were as good as anything our fellows have ever seen. These were the troops who broke through and got there and put up a tough fight about getting out of there. They used modern infantry tactics and filtered forward in their charges, keeping widely dispersed and flitting from cover to cover. In that way numbers of them evaded our machine-gun and rifle fire and grenades, but those who did had to face bayonets in the end and either ran away or concluded their lives that way.

Now that the battle is over, the situation has returned for the fourth time to its *status quo ante*. The Japs hang over Guadalcanal in the north all the way from east to west like swords of Damocles. They will range and pepper and harass and do everything they can to make the island a battlefield instead of a base.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE TOKYO EXPRESS

GUADALCANAL, SOLOMON ISLANDS

A SECTION of what is called here "The Tokyo Express" came chugging down from the north yesterday (November 9) and began to make a problem of itself for our forces.

This was in the cool of the evening, a very refreshing coolness indeed, and pleasant after the heat of the tropical day, and men sat around waiting for the problem to come to a head. There were no porches to sit on, only sandbags along the edges of the dugouts, but sandbags actually seemed like "An extension of Main Street," with men sitting there in typical porch attitudes—knees crossed, faces lifted toward the sunset, pulling leisurely on pipes.

"The Tokyo Express" presented its old familiar problem—sending in one light cruiser and ten destroyers for the sneak punch which is intended to land several thousand troops and supplies. The naval craft throw hundreds of shells and then run away.

Each of these night landings is a separate problem, and all together they build up into quite a splitting headache,

as the Japs, when they feel that they have landed enough men, put their engines of destruction into high gear and come shooting at this little beach-head with the freshly landed troops and with substantial units of their fleet and air force.

The proper compress for these headaches is the application of all our weapons, but last night's symptoms of this woefulness, this little Jap force threading down from the north like the root of some malignant weed, was put into the lap of Navy and Marine aviators. As evening began, it was reposeing there tranquilly "in its accustomed position," as one operations officer put it.

Official communiqués will have informed you of results long before this dispatch can, but in case you've forgotten, the Japs' effort to throw the sneak punch resulted in bangs on their noses this time. Their cruiser and their two destroyers were hit and put out of action, if not sunk. Fifteen of the force's twenty supporting planes were shot down.

So the Japs, feeling naked without the protection of their planes and the cruiser's guns, high-tailed toward home to await another dark night for another try. Incidentally, the Japs prefer to load troops on destroyers rather than transports when operating in such comparatively small forces, because destroyers move faster, are harder to hit, and pack a wallop of their own.

This story might be called hot time on a Saturday night in Guadalcanal in which our men have lived in foxholes and in cockpits that have become so familiar the men seem to be in ruts.

At the beginning there was weather climbing down from the sky to the north. The sun was setting noisily with a splash of colors as loud as trumpet blasts, and above the blare of color lay weather, mouse-gray and soft and furry-looking at the bottom and billowing up to black at the top. The wind was making its way gently through this monsoon, bursts of howlers and gales trailing on behind it.

The weather was the main topic of conversation because the enemy force was hiding under it, and waiting American pilots would have to fight their way through it in order to hit the Japs and then fight their way home, by which time they agreed that the monsoon would really have piled up all over everything.

Blind landings by exhausted pilots whose nerves had been buttoned up in the battle were made even more unpleasant by the fact that pilots have to get down very low in order to see anything, and eight-thousand-foot mountains that are too high to vault over and too thick to brush away lie waiting in the dark toward home. Nobody considered the possibility of not having to face the problem of landing, and most seemed to regard it as the evening's major worry.

The queer antics of a monsoon in a matter of seconds can drive even a Flying Fortress (as this reporter discovered two days ago) down like a hammer hitting a pin into a pincushion and then boot it booming upwards perpendicularly. The whole fall and rise covers an area of more than a thousand feet, and all this placed second on the worry list.

The next worry came from the fact that a compass course would have to be steered home, the sky being starless, and compasses have the habit of developing unpredictable variations when jarred by machine guns. The Japs, themselves, nesting among their ferocious cluster of fire-power, placed fourth down there among such also-ran worries as where the mail from home was.

When night came down, as it does here with a pounce, rain began to fall and talk was adjourned until we filed into already sopping-wet tents. There was really no halt to the steady, quiet burble of talk. All the tents here have shrapnel holes and the men caught in the down-pour would shift places as the wind shifted the rain, but they talked through that and through the sound the guns

made. The Marines, eight miles east, were brewing up some powerful potion. The Japs were replying nervously, and the guns groaned, wailed, and chattered in the jungle like animals in pain. They were so close they seemed to be working inside our ears, and there were several big guns that sounded like no animal on earth. Their shells rushed past us like burning freight trains, rumbling wildly, and as if the speed of their passing had set their flames to roaring.

But the men had a trick of making themselves heard through all this uproar without even raising their voices.

Operations kept the men waiting an uneasily long time. Hitting a surface force with airplanes is a one-punch operation. And if you do not land, you generally do not get time for another wallop. In addition, you are kept struggling with a tremendous number of unpredictable things, uncertainties, and complications.

Then word came to go, and the men started running down the muddy bomb-and-shell-pocked hillock toward their planes. The blacked-out night swallowed them up very quickly.

I remember there was one young lieutenant telling me what he was going to do on his leave on the mainland when he got it. He was going to get his wife to come out from Atlanta to meet him on the West Coast, and they would ride back to Georgia in a drawing room. . . .

The pilots ran past foxholes, dugouts in which men were sleeping with their clothes on despite the rain, because everybody here knew for sure that if these boys missed, the Japs would not!

The Jap ships were spread out fanwise thirty-five miles wide when our boys found them. They had eight biplanes and twelve Zeros thrown across their prow and our fellows plowed through this welter of cannon and machine-gun fire before lowering themselves into the really heavy stuff being thrown up by the ships.

The fight blazed in the storm and darkness as briefly and hotly as a gunpowder fire, and the men, hurtling through the pelt of bullets, snatched only flash views of the action. But they had the satisfaction of seeing two torpedoes of heavy poundage hit the cruiser which was the main target, one torpedo blast one destroyer, bombs hit a second destroyer, and, as a kind of afterthought, remembered knocking down seven of the eight biplanes which got between them and the target and five of the twelve Zeros. The Zeros evidently were less impetuous about getting in the way.

As a final fillip to the action, our fellows, busting off over the horizon with all their bombs discharged, heard two tremendous explosions, apparently caused by flames reaching the cruiser's magazines.

Then the boys came home, and some of us, hearing of the good they'd done, climbed out of the dugouts and went muddily to bed, while others slept on undisturbed until morning without knowing the Japs had been crippled, and dreaming in the back of their minds of when the bombs from the Jap force would start falling.

IN the course of an informal conversation here, Vice-Admiral William F. Halsey, Jr., United States Naval Commander in the South Pacific, emphasized what all who have fought the Japanese believe—that, unlike the case of Germany, there is no short cut to victory over Japan.

Against Germany, there is the possibility of underground elements coming aboveground and cooperating with an Allied military thrust, at least by embarrassing if not disrupting the home front. But American officers here, who have been investigating why the Japanese, from the merest private on up, fight as implacably as they do, have concluded that no such help may be expected from the Japanese people any time soon.

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Admiral Halsey said he thought the war could not be ended short of an invasion of the Japanese mainland, and added, "I hope so and I want to be there to see it. The man who controls the seas is the man who will win this war," the Admiral declared, and pointed out that the seas cannot be controlled without bases and can be solidified only by sinking Jap ships. "We have got to sink ships, sink ships, and sink more ships."

This was interpreted as indicating that Admiral Halsey is at present convinced that island-by-island rolling back of Japanese power, coupled with a war of attrition, is the best way to conduct our operations now. Observers fresh from the United States mainland regard these as very blunt facts, indeed, but usually only one or two contacts with the Japs are necessary to convince them that the sooner Americans back home face these facts and stand up to them, the quicker the job will be done.

Marine officers here, many of them long-time residents of Japan who speak and read the language, have made painstaking efforts to discover why Japanese soldiers and their officers almost invariably are ready to die rather than surrender. The Japs express this readiness with fantastic and frequently useless acts of desperation.

In the first place, no direct evidence has been found here of a suicide impulse among the Jap troops, nor does it seem likely that the Shinto teachings, that a man dying on the battlefield goes straight to heaven, play any considerable part in dictating the action of troops in the field. The Japs are people like anybody else. While there are intense Shinto believers among them, most of them seem like most of the rest of us, and, as regards after-life, they are for it, all right, but meanwhile they are willing to be content with a bird in the hand rather than in the bush.

Secondly, among more than six hundred prisoners taken in the operations here so far, most singly or in small batches, not one is an officer. Prisoners have been taken only when separated from their units.

Thirdly, the evidence indicates that the Jap soldier, when beyond the personal observation of officers, is definitely reluctant to give battle unless he is pretty sure the odds are with him. This is apparent in the case of Zero planes manned by noncommissioned officers or privates or in the case of isolated machine-gun nests.

Fourthly, and perhaps most provocative, Jap soldiers in direct contact with their officers keep trying to kill our men even in the last extremities and even after having suffered torments in the jungle calculated to rob the average mentality of all will except the desire to survive.

Finally, no Jap officer has yet been discovered who was reluctant to throw himself and his men against any odds or was minus a willingness to die rather than surrender. That is so basic that it seems deeper than habit. . . .

Opinions derived from these facts make a long story, but briefly they are that Japan's ruling class, from which the officers stem, had the firmest control over its people; that Jap troops are convinced it will be impossible for them to return home if they are disgraced in battle by showing weakness before the enemy or by being taken prisoner; and that victory for us will be difficult until enough officers have been killed to impair their control over troops and sailors. The Japs' costly venture in China does not seem to have impaired the officers' control over the troops here, many of whom are veterans of this campaign.

A morsel of comfort in the situation is the fact that the supply of Jap officers is limited, as indicated by the increasing number of bomber and fighter pilots taken from the uneducated classes without being given commissions. It seems to be true that the feudal system, which was all right in the days when a war was decided by knights in comparatively individual combat, does not rest on a broad enough base to stand up against democratic fire-power. . . .

CHAPTER NINE

JUNGLE BATTLE

WITH THE UNITED STATES FORCES IN THE JUNGLES OF GUADALCANAL

VETERANS of Central America bushfighting and of Belleau Wood and the Argonne who are now here describe the terrain over which our forces have been advancing yard by blood-stained yard since November 1 as the worst battle terrain any army ever fought over. And this is probably underestimating the situation.

Japanese habitués of this terrain, most of them veterans of the Malay and Java jungles, tried very hard for about five hours today to get this reporter. On any ordinary battlefield this would have been like potting an overstuffed pillow in the parlor for any trained soldier, your correspondent having the bulk of the average general without comparable agility in concealing same.

The Japs tried first with snipers, then with machine guns, and finally brought up mortars. I suspended breathing frequently, but never permanently, and the closest the Japs could come was to bedeck me with clipped-off leaves of the local vegetation and to freshen my complexion with mud-packs applied in clumps from the rifle bullets that smacked into the earth around me. Even new Marines coming up to the firing line for the first time, and thus still respectful of the invisible terrors of the jungle (it takes an average of two days for the green troops to learn their way around), opened up on me for about forty minutes without damaging anything except my nervous system. This proves how exasperating this terrain is for an army trying to get somewhere.

The tactics of the Jap here are exactly the same as he used in his *blitz* through four thousand miles of Allied bastions for the five months ending early last May. But the Marine tactics which the Army is faithfully following here blows the Jap *blitz* right back into their faces. And now, since we started our first large-scale, full panoplied land offensive on November 1, we have proved capable of generating plenty in the way of a "Made in the U.S.A." *blitz*.

The Japs have tried to dam up the slow, steady, and paralyzing flow of our green-clad troops into their territory here with everything they have, including landings of new forces to our rear, but the results to date have been all in our favor. The main offensive westward of the air fields advanced about three miles beyond the Matanikou River in nine days through terrain where a man, walking without opposition and without cares, would be doing well to average two hundred yards per hour, or about one mile in nine hours.

The terrain eastward does not feature the fortress-like ridges, honeycombed with caves and matted down with unmanicured jungle that make the western front as mortal as a beehive. Thus, a regiment of Japs, landed on the west off destroyers early on November 3 in an effort to force us to thin out our thrust, was able to lead us five miles down the coast before getting themselves bottled up. As this is being written, this particular force has water at its back, and an infantry unit and Marines under Brigadier General E. B. Sebree of the Army has them ringed around from beach to beach in a semi-circle with a radius of six hundred yards, and automatic weapons are pouring on a real Corregidor shellacking.

There is nothing new in our tactics here, according to General A. A. Vandergrift. "Hell," he told this reporter, "I've been fighting this type of war the same way since I was a kid of a second lieutenant." British officers, in Malaya, facing unknown and undetectable fire power on the flanks and in the rear, had the habit of fighting their way backwards to conserve their force from what they believed a formidable "Kiel und Kessel" Tokyo style, but we simply stand our ground, wait and see.

We are daytime fighters, and when twilight comes, we revert to our Indian-fighting past and build old-fashioned squares of defense around each separate automatic weapon. In the morning we resume our advance, leaving rear echelons to destroy whatever has filtered through. It was while going up toward the front lines that this reporter was fired at, and got a case of squeaky nerves.

All these goings-on would fill any military map of so-called fronts with very queasy lines, which are hardly lines at all, but really just X's to mark the spots where the bodies lie.

It was a forty-five-minute drive in a jeep from the tent where the press was quartered to where the two-hundred-yard deep western front begins on this embattled island. Our boys are already swimming and washing clothes in the Matanikou River this morning while the rumble of guns on ahead is making the water quiver with a massaging effect.

"I figure," said one expert launderer, "three more batteries are needed to turn this river into a real, high-grade washing machine."

From the river on, the jungle shore is withered and blistered with blackened clumps where the Japs held their line with what amounted to natural pill-boxes. Artillery dug them out or plowed them under. The smell of dead bodies still hangs, in clouds and thick as smoke over these narrowly separated places where men who had traveled four thousand miles elected to stand and die. Huge trees which were felled or severed by shells are sticking up like gaunt, amputated limbs, like the wounded of the last war in Vienna who had turned beggars and used mutely to hold up their unbandaged stumps to passers-by.

Our fellows have elected to die here, too. Along the road pounded through by the wheels of our trucks lie several graves, one of a private. His friends have trimmed its mound pathetically with coconuts and fashioned a rude wooden cross for a headstone. A helmet with three holes in it, the holes as blank as dead eyes, tops the cross and on it is penciled, "A Real Guy." Against the cross stands a photograph of a very pretty girl, staring silently. The sunlight is very bright here and you can see the brown color of the eyes in the photograph and seem to be able to look deep into them down past the look she gave the Dodge City, Kansas, photographer and his camera. Her dead man must have loved her truly, for he carried her picture into battle.

THE shoreline runs a short distance along the sea, then begins precipitously to climb into ridges which mount rapidly into an eight-thousand-foot mountain range. Each ridge drops steeply into a ravine, known as a draw. The ridges are about five hundred yards apart and run from north to south. Since our advance is east to west, our troops have to go up and down steadily as if over waves. The jungle runs up along the sides of each ridge almost to the top, and then on the top there is bare grass, completely bare, not a tree or log or twig. The Japs stay down in the ravines and fire up at the bare space on top. That means our fellows going up and over after them are clearly outlined while the Japs have dense, actually impenetrable cover. Complicating the tactical problem even more is the fact that the jungle-covered sides of each ridge are pocked with naturally eroded coral caves which the Japs have enlarged and in which they entrench themselves obstinately. Flame-throwers are no good against these caves. The jungle, through which sunlight never penetrates and in which only lizards and red orchids flourish, is too damp to permit flame-throwers to function. The Japs either have to be interred in their caves or excavated by hand.

American troops, no doubt, will face more formidable opposition before this war is concluded, but never a more desperate terrain filled with more desperate men.

On the eastern front, tanks are used to flush the Japs

out of the grass, and when they are flushed, they are shot down like running quail. But tanks are useless on the western side of Henderson Field. On the western side, it is all manual labor.

We sat on a ridge which had been won yesterday, then squatted to watch our Marines move up to the next ridge about five hundred yards westward and start scooping out the succeeding ravine.

The second wave of Marines worked their way forward slowly, flowing up the covered side of the ridge in the slow, purposeful uncertain-seeming way of rain drops on a window, stretcher-bearers coming slowly down among them from the top. There was a mingling of Marines and corps men, and suddenly, in the midst of the mingle, flanking mortar fire dropped. Wham! The crack of it came back to us hard enough to sound like a hammer against the flesh of the brain. Then, wham again and wham! Three fifteen-pound shells in all, and the jungle's trees, all gnarled and burdened with parasitic creepers, bent and thrashed and groaned under the blasts. The Japs sent over only the three, evidently being short of heavy ammunition which they had been unable to drag with them in their retreat.

I think I closed my eyes when the first shell hit. It seemed too horrible, our men and the stretcher cases forming a cluster to cheer each other up and then becoming a bull's-eye for the Japs. When I opened my eyes, the ground was bare. There were three holes in it, very close together. I thought everybody there had been killed, and I sat there a moment thinking about that. Then Marines began to lift themselves from the earth to which they had dropped, and one by one, heads down, gathering up their rifles and gear as they went, resumed their slow, purposeful, upward flow. They never looked back. They just went on up and over.

Then down the other side, cautiously, probing, seeking to draw fire in order to locate Japs to shoot at. They drew fire all right—three machine-gun nests clustered so close together in the jungle that a grenade attack would most likely have been sufficient to wipe it out. But the Marines now enjoy the luxury of artillery and nobody is wasting men around here—not our boys, not the kind of fellows we have here. So everybody waited for the big boys to go to work. They waited patiently, dug in one hundred yards from the nests.

It seemed as if it might be a long wait, and we scuttled through the sniper fire to the command post where Colonel John M. Arthur, of Union, South Carolina, directing operations on the whole front, Lieutenant Colonel Cornelius P. Van Ness and the artilleryman, Colonel William Keating, of Philadelphia, were ensconced. Fifteen Zeros, one of them burning, were working up some sort of hell in back of us back near the airport, at the same time that rifle and machine-gun fire was cracking all around us, and officers were trying to make themselves heard on the telephone above the din.

Captain Maxie Williams, a blondy, chunky, footballish young man, standing recklessly in the open trying to isolate the Jap harassing fire so it could be smothered and the command could be left to command in peace, called for three volunteers to swing around and work over to a certain tall tree. Sergeant Major Frank Regan, of Dallas, Texas, and combat reporter Sergeant Ned Burman, of San Francisco, crawled forth, Burman observing sallowly, "I forgot the first rule of the Marines—never volunteer for nothing."

I remarked to Captain Maxie that all this going-on reminded me of Harlan County, Kentucky, on election day, where politics are so mixed up that you cannot tell whether you are shooting a friend or a foe. And Captain Maxie leaned into the crater where we were hiding from the bul-

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lets to shout, "Sure aint like Humphries County," he being from Waverly, Tennessee.

Through all the shooting, Colonel Keating directed the artillery fire toward the Jap machine guns holding up our advance. He worked like a surgeon probing for an ulcer. The first thing I heard him say—he had to shout over the rifle and machine-gun fire—was, "Now, just be calm and careful. We don't expect you to do any better than your best under the existing circumstances." He was talking to a boy in a forward artillery observation post whose job it was to direct the artillery fire. The boy, being so close to the target, was nervous.

He gave a target and Colonel Keating ordered one shell fired. We could hear this boom! like some brass-lunged giant clearing his throat, and then the feathered whistle of the shell. "It's passing right overhead now," said Colonel Keating. "Just watch for it. It ought to be there any minute." Then we heard the boom of the explosion.

Then the boy gave another target. Altogether, three ranging shots were fired. The fourth shot was right on the target. Colonel Keating asked the same battery to fire a salvo of five shells, and we heard the booms all run together and the feathered whistles all run together and the explosions like one long explosion. Then silence.

"Do you want any more?" Colonel Keating asked the boy, and I could hear the boy's voice squeaking exultantly through the telephone.

"That's enough, sir," he said.

All advances here are like that, inch by inch, slow and easy, and the Japs don't seem to have anything to stop them except another one of their combined-operations attacks—a fleet by sea, a fleet by air, forcing us to fall back on the airport and bury there the hell the Japs raise.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE SINKING OF THE *PRESIDENT COOLIDGE*

SOMEWHERE IN THE PACIFIC

THE mine that hit the liner *President Coolidge* made hardly any sound at all and was just felt as a jar by the men on board, a deep, shaking jar.

This reporter happened to be flying over the ship in a bomber at the time. The slate-gray liner was making its way slowly through a slate-gray morning. Then it seemed to lurch like a man hit heavily, and a big, gaseous-looking bubble welled up on its starboard side just about midships and hung swollen on the surface of the sea for a moment before bursting.

The ship swung hard to port, and then suddenly it seemed to lurch again and another gaseous-looking bubble, apparently with oil in it because it was streaked with rainbow colors, welled up, this time forward of midships.

Captain Henry Nelson headed instantly for a near-by coral reef. He rammed the reef and the bow of the *Coolidge* drove well up on it and stayed there. It seemed as if the cargo had been saved and, possibly, the ship. But the *Coolidge's* bottom was torn open and water was pouring in. Because of the slope, the water all rolled back into the stern. In about an hour, the stern had become so heavy that it pulled the bow off the reef and a few minutes later the ship turned over on its side, then turned topside down, and then sank stern first, the bow going down last.

The plane with this reporter in it turned around and sat down immediately. By the time I returned to the scene in one of the rescue boats, the work of life-saving was well under way.

There had been no panic, not even for an instant, survivors declared. The moment the mine had hit, the

troops on board had been ordered back to their quarters to get them out of the way of the merchant sailors who were struggling to salvage the vessel and, later, speed up the work of rescue.

Cargo nets were thrown over the side to facilitate descent and the men were called up out of their quarters in sections as rescue boats were available for them. It was a nervous time for the men locked in below with grating, grinding noises going on all around them, and the sound of running feet overhead, shouts, commands, and so forth, and the ship listing and sliding occasionally. But America's army men seem to be made of special stuff, for their youthful nerves held up without breaking. While the men sat waiting for their time to be called topside, and wondering if that time would come soon enough, many entertained themselves with singing—frequently racy songs. And colored troops particularly took occasion to bang out the last bits of music on cherished instruments they would have to abandon for lack of space on the rescue boats.

One of the surprising features of the incident, according to Major Costain, was the great number of army men who did not know how to swim. These men clambered obediently down the cargo nets, but when they had to let go and drop into the water, their minds just froze up and they could not release their holds. Officers climbed down the cargo nets after them and walked on their fingers to break their holds, and while this was going on, the scene took on a nightmare quality—the silent, tense men, eyes closed, faces all locked up, clinging desperately to the cargo nets, while equally desperate officers shouted at them, and walked on their fingers, and kicked at their fingers in an effort to save them, all this to an accompaniment from the interior of the ship of youthful voices lifted in ribald songs, and twanging guitars and a bedlam of phonograph records.

The rescue boat that carried me to the ship's side found one young soldier clambering down a rope which was fifteen feet short of the water. He was very calm. He held to the rope with his two hands and looked down at us calmly.

"Jump!" the coxswain shouted. "I can't swim," replied the soldier. "Jump, we'll catch you!" we all shouted.

"Well, I don't know," the soldier said. "I can't swim." A whole stream of profanity was directed at him and he swung there gently, listening us out, apparently too polite to interrupt. Then he said, "Well, all right, but I can't swim a stroke." Then he began to count. "One," he said, "two, three," and paused and said, "Well, here goes," and counted, "four, five, six, and one for good measure."

When he got to nine, he let go and hit just off our bow and sank like a stone. We waited, boathook ready, for him to come up. It seemed he never would come up, but finally he broke water and we hauled him on board. Then we found out he had jumped with a fully loaded cartridge-belt around his waist and with this weight on him had just plummeted on down. When he revived, spluttering, he said, "I told you fellows I couldn't swim."

LAST to leave the ship were the officers. When the order came to withdraw to quarters, the officers retired with their men and passed their men on out to topside in orderly fashion, and shepherded them into the boats.

The one army officer who died had withdrawn to a hole with his men. By the time their turn came to leave, the only way out was hand-over-hand on a rope. This officer was the last to go, and, when he tried, he discovered he was too exhausted to pull himself up. He started to call for help.

His voice was not a strong one and there was a lot of noise as the last men aboard were scrambling off. But his lifelong friend, Captain Covill, of the United States Army, who had been searching for him and hoping he

had got away, heard him and came sliding to the rescue along with a warrant officer and a defense worker who happened to be on board.

These three men stood on the edge of the hold and tried to haul up the officer who was trapped below by his own exhaustion. The last rescue boat was bobbing up and down uneasily alongside the vessel, shouting to the three men it could see, to hurry, and warning them there was not a moment to waste. But the three could not bring themselves to abandon the trapped officer.

They told the Captain to hold on to the rope and they would pull him up. They got him about halfway up, but he was too tired to hold on any longer and let go and fell to the bottom of the hold.

Then the rescue boat, realizing that it would be sucked down with the suction of the ship, gave a last despairing warning. The three men did not even turn around. Captain Covill said he heard all the warnings clearly and that they all heard all the warnings, but felt abandoning this Captain was more than they could do. The rescue boat pulled away hastily with a clanging of the coxswain's bell and a churning and putt-putt of the exhaust, and from where I was I could see the three small, dark figures turn for a moment to watch it go off and then turn back to the hold. Hundreds of men were watching the scene in silence from safe vantage points, and it filled their eyes and filled their hearts to breaking.

An extra rope had been found somewhere in the hold and the Captain down below there had tied it around his waist and was trying to splice it to the rope held by his would-be rescuers and get pulled up that way when the *Coolidge* went down.

Captain Covill said that when the water hit him and boiled up all around him, he knew he was going to be sucked down with the ship, and all he could think of was to get it over as fast as possible. He opened his mouth wide and gulped in sea water. Then a remarkable thing happened. The three men outside the ship were sucked down with it and went down and down, perhaps as far as to the bottom, but somewhere along the way something like an air bubble formed and threw all three to the surface where they could swim to safety.

The Captain who had been trapped in the hold by his own weariness, died there.

CHAPTER TWELVE

AMERICANS CAN FIGHT SOMEWHERE ON THE PACIFIC

OUR fellows look very calm in battle. I never saw any of their faces break all up the way an actor's does, or go into sculptured lines of resolve, or anything like that. They're just there doing a job with this gun or that, or in a hole somewhere, and that's the way they look, like fellows preoccupied with a job and wrinkling up their brows over it.

This is important. The Japs are the toughest enemy we have ever had to face. As far as I could tell in those proving grounds in the Solomons, we are beating them in every department of war. This is a statement with which no ranking officer will agree publicly. They think such news given to Americans will make Americans soften up and throw away a victory there is now every reason to believe we shall win some day—not, perhaps, soon, but some day.

In the Solomons, two-to-one odds against us have been the minimum, and the odds have gone as high as twelve and fifteen to one. But, just the same, we've been winning out there all along. In the five battles of the Solomons, the least we have done is keep the Japs from winning—which is victory, in a military sense when a long, hard war is still in its preliminary stages—and in our biggest suc-

"Battle for the Solomons," by Ira Wolfert

cesses, in the fourth and fifth battles, we not only have kept the Japs from winning, but have made them pay heavily for trying to win.

We've licked the Japs on land, on sea, and in the air. We've shown that we have more military brains than they have, are better at war, all kinds of war, from strangling and knife-fighting and head-trampling on up into the complicated mechanized operations of modern battle. The Solomons haven't shown yet that we can outproduce the Japs, but we think that's true, that we can make as good material as anybody and can make more of it than the Japs, and can replace it faster than they can.

But there's one thing that nobody in the world can be better at than the Japs and that's in the guts department. They have more guts than the Germans have. At least, they have shown thus far in the Solomons deal, which is the first deal where they've had to hold their chins out and take it, that they have more guts. The Germans have said "Kamerad" in the past and may be relied on to say it in the future. But the Japs have never surrendered, never *en masse*, and only rarely as individuals. We have not yet taken a single officer alive on Guadalcanal, although we have tried in every way we know how. And the great majority of the few soldier prisoners we have taken have been wounded and in a condition where their minds have not been up to par.

Every day I was there, the Jap gave new evidence of his intense willingness to go to any lengths to win, or, if unable to win, to go on fighting until his breath stopped.

Under the heading of going to any lengths to win, the following incident may be cited as an illustration. The Jap seems to think it useful in land fighting to put snipers in our rear to harass us. Once, early in November, our fellows, working their way west of the Matanikou River, were held up for a day and one-half along a narrow sector. They drove the Japs out of that sector about dawn of a Wednesday and held there all that day and the next day. Toward five o'clock Thursday afternoon, a Marine, deciding to dig in for the night, found some soft-looking dirt on the edge of a tree and with the first poke of his shovel hit a Jap body. The Jap was covered over very lightly with a sprinkle of dirt, but his uniform had made him look only like some leaves and rotting twigs lying amid the dirt. The Marine uncovered the Jap and through the whole brushing-off process the Jap did not move except as pushed and jostled. But nobody who knows anything takes chances with the Japs any more. So the Marine picked up this Jap's arm and let it drop. It dropped limply and the face remained motionless and emotionless as in death. The Marine did it again, half-heartedly this time, very sure that this was a dead Jap. But the Jap, who had performed the superhuman task of lying under our feet feigning death for a day and a half just in order to get behind our lines and snipe at us, proved to have a human touch around his eyes.

This second time he couldn't stand it any more and one eyelid twitched nervously.

UNDER the heading of willingness to go on fighting, this story may be told. I haven't my notes with me, and I can't remember this Marine captain's name, but everybody called him Wimpy. Wimpy was out on patrol and ran into some Japs holed up in a native hut. Quite a hot little brush followed, and after about fifteen minutes our side got no more answering fire.

Wimpy crawled up close and saw that all the Japs were dead except one, who seemed badly wounded. This one was lying on the floor of the hut in a corner farthest from the door. He was bleeding from the mouth and stared solemnly at Wimpy, and Wimpy decided to try taking him prisoner.

HIGHLIGHTS of the NEW BOOKS

For twenty minutes, Wimpy cajoled and begged and tried everything he knew, waving a handkerchief as a flag of truce, offering "pogie bait," as the Marines call candy, as a bribe. The Jap did not answer. The blood flowed steadily from his mouth and his face occasionally broke under pain, but he just stared solemnly at Wimpy.

So the Marine captain decided to go in after the man. He went in the door, holding his revolver in his hand, and stood there pointing the revolver. He stood as far away as he could because wounded Japs, so hurt they could not throw a grenade, have been known to pull the pin as somebody comes near them and blow up the reckless one as well as themselves.

So Wimpy stayed as far away as possible and pointed his gun. The Jap lifted himself to his hands and knees and began to crawl toward a dead Jap officer who was wearing a sword. "Don't do that!" cried Wimpy. "I'll have to shoot you." Wimpy didn't dare go near the man. All he could do was point his gun and shout. The Jap kept crawling slowly for the sword and took out the sword and Wimpy stamped his foot and shouted, "You damn fool! Oh, you damn, damn fool! I'll have to kill you." Then the Jap lifted himself to his feet, and lifted the sword over his head and started toward Wimpy, and Wimpy had to shoot him dead.

THESE are not exceptional cases. They are typical. So there can be no question of our being better fighters than the Japs. The best anybody can possibly do is be as good, and rely on our superiority in all other departments of war to give us the victory in the long run.

It's not easy to be as good. And it's important that we should be, because if we aren't we're going to lose this war, or, if not lose it, make a compromise peace which will turn over to the next generation the job of winning it. Our fellows fighting have to be as tough and the people back home have to be able to stand the losses, stand all the terrible sorrow and misery that the dead leave in their wake, and have to be able to feel that the dead husband and dead lover and dead son have not died for something that we could do without, but have swapped their lives for something worth the price. And they have to be able to keep on feeling it steadily every day for all the time it will take to win.

Our losses have been very small thus far. That is because we have been on the defensive in the Solomons since the day we took the place. The Japs have had to come after us. Soon we'll have to start north and go in after them. Then our losses are very likely to increase. There are a lot of people better able than I am to guess how the people back home are going to stand up under that. What I can say is how our fighting fellows are going to stand up under it because I've seen them do it.

In every battle I've watched out here, our side turns up with quite a few heroes, fellows who do more than they are supposed to do.

But heroes don't win wars. They help, just as everything else that's good helps. But the heroes are the exception, and it's the ordinary, run-of-the-mill guy who doesn't feel tempted to do more than his share who has to be relied on to win for our side. This doesn't sound glamorous, but I think it's accurate. So all the words that follow will be devoted to the ordinary fighting man on our side and how he measures up to this most difficult job in our history—being as tough, man for man, as the Japs.

As I have noted previously, our fellows look very calm in battle. The look of them is very provocative because, as I know from personal experience, a part of the mind seems to run away during battle and keeps trying to make the rest of the mind run away with it. The conscious

mind, which is the part of the mind that knows all the things it has been taught, wants to stay and do the job it's supposed to do, and this other part of the mind, the subconscious part, doesn't want to know from nothing and just wants to get the hell away from there. The subconscious mind can't go off all by itself. It has to take you along with it. And to a fellow in this position, particularly when the battle is long and the struggle in himself is prolonged, it actually feels as if the subconscious mind is laying rough hands on the rest of him and pulling, hauling, and screaming at him. And I know in my own case whenever I have been in an action there has always been this uproar in my head, this steady, wild-eyed, wild-haired screaming, making it very difficult to think about the work I had to do there.

But our fellows, filled inside with this demented uproar and hemmed in all around outside by the uproar of battle, just stay there and do the work they have to do. They don't look like actors being brave. They look mostly like fellows working.

Nobody looks young in a fight. I've seen lots of twenty-year-olds out there in the middle of all that stuff flying around and some eighteen-year-olds, but I never saw anybody who looked much under forty while the fight was going on. That's one way our fellows show what they're up against. The blood in their young faces gets watered with a kind of liquid of fear and takes on that blued-over color of watery milk. Their skin looks clothlike, with the texture of a rough, wrinkled cloth.

Then, when things get really thick, like when fellows start getting hit and dropping and crying out with pain all around you, and you can't pay any attention to that, but just have to keep on working your little gadget, pressing that little button or turning that little wheel or adding up that little set of figures, whatever it is—well, when it gets like that, still the faces of our fellows don't show what an actor's would.

Sometimes the flesh around their mouths starts to shake as if they were whimpering and their eyes . . . you can see their eyes coated over with a hot shine as if they were crying. But they go right on doing what they have to do. The bombardiers keep right on figuring with their pencils on little white scratch-pads of paper, right in the middle of all that's going on, marking down figures and adding them up or subtracting or dividing and checking the answers, just like in school, looking—except maybe for the crying in their eyes and the whimpering around their mouths—all puckered up with thought, too, like earnest students in a school. And the gunners and radio operators, all the technicians and specialists, the plumbers, mechanics, cooks, the skilled laborers, doing the work of war—they're the same. They don't look tough, even when they're being their toughest, but they stick to their work and think about it, and do it, and do it well.

IT'S not so hard for a man to be tough, even these man-children who are fighting the war with us, if he can think, "Well, now I have to be tough," and get some internal help that way. He can put a tough expression on his face like an actor, and have something to live up to, have like a flag on his face to march along behind or a feeling of pride in himself and in the way he's behaving to keep him up to the mark. But in the actions I have seen, there hasn't been any time to think about anything like that and the fellows had to be tough without any extra help at all. They had to go on being tough, not because of something put into them by their own minds to hop them up, but just because of something that was in them already, that lives in them all the time and is there waiting to be used as needed. And all our fellows have this toughness—well, say, ninety-nine per cent.

The officers are tough, too, elderly men with paunches on them and wattles and dewlaps and so forth. They're all tough, not only in battle, where excitement carries a

man along, but in the desperate, dirty, inglorious jobs done along the lines leading up to the front. The staff work, for instance, where men who have believed all their lives (as all those who are convinced about democracy believe) that men are more important than property, have on occasion to throw over their beliefs and value such property as ships and planes and battle real estate over their own men. They have, for instance, to add up the probable cost in ships of saving drowning men, and if the cost in ships is likely to be prohibitive they have to order the ships out of there, and leave the men to drown. Everybody involved in this operation finds it loathsome, and finds it leaves something in the mind that is not easy to put down. But we have done it where necessary and we shall do it again where we have to because our fellows who are doing the fighting, the elderly ones and the young ones, believe there is nothing more important in life than winning the war, and that nothing and nobody, no personal tragedies or disasters or selfishness, or any human emotion at all, can be allowed to stand in the way of winning. And in the Solomons, our fellows have shown they are tough enough to act on their beliefs.

Colonel Arthur, who was directing Marine operations west of the Matanikou during the drive that began November 1, remarked, "The Japs are good fighters, but poor soldiers." He was referring not only to their tactics, but to their officers' habit of wasting their men's lives on some intangible and inscrutable objective.

NOBODY on our side is criticizing this habit of the Japs. The more lives they waste, the sooner the war will end. But our side is not wasting any lives. There is a line between wasting and spending lives. In the Solomons our officers have drawn this line. No life is wasted there, but our officers have had the guts to spend lives, their own as well as their men's. Which is the way wars are not only fought, but won.

It's just guessing to say what it is that lives in our fellows all the time and gives them the strength to be as tough as the Japs. But I think it's pride in being an American.

Nobody I knew ever thought much about being an American, or would fail to be embarrassed by mention of it, or, in fact, would fail to describe all this as a "crook of hock." But it seems to me now, after all those red-letter days in the Solomons, that it's the truth that Americans subconsciously, and without really knowing it themselves, are very arrogant about being Americans.

All the different people of the world involved in this world war—the primitive blacks, for instance, on Guadalcanal—have stood up very well in it. Americans seem to be aware, without knowing it consciously, that they are a mixture of all the peoples in the world, a well-nourished, athletic, free-to-think, rather less frustrated and so somewhat better integrated mixture.

Most of the fellows now doing the fighting have taken a lot of abuse in the recent past from the newspapers, and orators, and mostly the Republican politicians against the New Deal "pampering," and other worriers who were trying to scold and abuse and insult them into being tough about the depression, or food rationing, or soldiering, or what-the-hell.

But all those words and insults and restrictions and the whole terrible kicking around these young men have been taking from life in general ever since they were born, some of them, doesn't seem to have convinced very many of them that there is anything on earth, not any people or anything done by any people or invented or manufactured by any people, that can keep an American from doing a job he really knows he really has to do.

The overwhelming majority of jobs in this war are the dullest, most tedious kind of drudgery. They have nothing to do with fighting, but are just dangerous and crazy dull. The transport pilots, young gingerly fighting cocks,

flying supplies into Guadalcanal and wounded out of it, call themselves "flying truck-drivers," and feel quite poignantly that they've been sidetracked out of what they want to do—which is to fight or bomb.

The third time I flew into Guadalcanal, I went up on one of those transport planes. This one was piloted by a young rosy-cheeked lieutenant named George Wamsley. George started out to be a bomber pilot and then they threw him into this, much to his regret.

This was his first trip up to Guadalcanal and he was supposed to go in convoy because the weather was bad for navigation and there were plenty of Japs around. But, owing to some kind of mixup down at this New Hebrides base, the only load waiting for Wamsley at the take-off was four stretchers. He kept grumbling about sending an "empty truck" up to a place that needs more of everything there is, and, when I pointed out that the convoy would have to leave on schedule whether he was ready or not, and that if he went up without a convoy he'd be in plenty of trouble, he became intemperate and said: "What the hell kind of a load is that for a truck—four empty stretchers and one goddam newspaperman!"

So George stalled in one way and the other and finally a load of surgical instruments came tearing up to the tee just as the convoy was taking off. By the time we were loaded up, the convoy was a hundred and fifty miles away. We never did catch it, and we had a very sweaty five hours going into Guadalcanal by ourselves, but George and his crew were all so glad to be able to do some good that they worried hardly at all, even when we wandered into the wrong place and the Japs started shooting at our defenseless selves.

That was one American doing a job he didn't like and didn't want, and wanted to get out of, and doing it the best way he knew how. There are hundreds of thousands of others like that in the Pacific. The fellows stuck on these tiny desert islands along our line of communications to Australia are like men condemned to a kind of Devil's Island imprisonment with the added refinement of the knowledge that the Japs might try to come in any day on a raid, similar to our Makin Island raid, and exterminate them to a man.

THEIR only company is themselves. Their only relaxation has to be found in themselves. Most of them can't even go swimming in the sea—all around them—because of sharks, barracudas, tiger eels, and sting-rays.

Yet in all these places there is an air of great cheerfulness and bustle and friendliness. Loneliness and boredom and anticipating Japs are much more terrible enemies for a man than bullets. Yet these fellows come tearing down jovially to meet the planes, like yokels going to a depot to watch the trains go by in the old days before motor cars, and really put themselves out to help the wayfarers—most of whom they envy desperately—be comfortable in the midst of sand and bleached coral. Some of these fellows have been there nine months. They have the dirty end of the war, the really dirty no good end of it, but they're in there pitching all the same. It's easy for a man to be brave when he has to be, but for these fellows to keep hold of themselves when they know having a mental collapse or making a nuisance of themselves will release them from their jobs is something that requires real toughness.

I am very tired now, and will have to finish hastily. In the thousands of miles of war front that I have traveled these last months, I have seen nothing: (1) to make me think this is going to be a short or easy war; (2) to make me think we are going to lose it; (3) to make me feel anything but very proud of American guys and their girls.

November 30, 1942

A Pat Pending Story

Miracular

*Our foe leaped for
the door. We hit him
high, and we hit him
low.*

YOUR bewhiskered uncle in the star-spangled britches is a pretty swell guy to work for, but he doesn't always give with the gratitude for services rendered.

For instance, you'd think that after helping heave a bundle of bellicose Bundsmen into durance vile I'd become the fair-haired lad around our office, no? No! Less than a week later the Big Boss came galloping up to Philadelphia from the capital, and hauled me up on the carpet like a felt nap.

"Mallory," he challenged, "what's all this about you getting mixed up in a case of counter-espionage?"

I grinned and tried to blush modestly.

"Oh, nothing much, Mr. Dunne-gal," I said airily. "I just nabbed a nest of Nazis singlehanded, that's all. Why do you ask? Have I been voted a medal?"

"You've been voted," retorted the Chief, "a meddler! Mallory, you're a public servant—"

"B-but—"

"—And a public servant's first duty is to maintain dignified reserve and a quiet anonymity. Government employes should be scenery, not heard! By smearing your face all over the front pages you have brought undesirable publicity to the United States Patent Office. Now, I give you fair warning—"

"But, look, Chief," I argued desperately, "it wasn't my fault Pat and I were captured by those spies!"

"Who and you?"

"Pat. My companion in the adventure. Pat Pending."

"Pat Pend—" The Old Man's face crimsoned like an omelet Espagnole. "Just a minute! Are you trying to

tell me someone with a fantastic name like that was your compan—"

"No kidding, Boss! He's an inventor. A wacky sort of goof—mostly red hair, freckles, and air-cooled teeth, but he calls himself the 'greatest inventulator of all time.' He—he says he invented practically everything—"

"Mm-hml!" mm-hmed the Chief dangerously. "He and that Russian, no doubt?"

"Russian?"

"Regus Patoff. Their names always appear together." The Boss upended my typewriter viciously, pointed a finger at the underscribed legend: *Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.—Pat. Pending.* Then, "All right, Mallory!" he snarled. "I tried to be nice about this, but you had to have your little joke. So now I'm giving it to you straight. The next time you get involved in a situation that draws this office into the

limelight, you're fired! And now—good day!"

And he snatched up his briefcase and stalked out.

So that was that. I tossed my 12-Ds on the desk-top, and was slouched there brooding glumly on the old truism that honors are not without profit save in your own country—when suddenly a commotion rose outside, and the office door burst open.

"Mr. Mallory! Oh, Mr. Mallory, it's miracular! Let me have an appicaceous form, quick! I've got it! This time I've absolutantly got it!"

I shut my eyes and wished—hard. But when I opened them again he was still there.

I groaned: "Go away, Pending! Haven't you caused me enough trouble already?"

and Important

by NELSON
BOND

Illustrated
by
Frederic
Anderson



Pat Pending's map-of-Eire puss stared at me in blank bewilderment.

"Trouble, Mr. Mallory? I've caused you trouble?"

"First it was your bacular clock," I fretted. "Then your periscopop. I haven't known a quiet moment since the day I met you. And now the Chief threatens to can me if I get in any more messes. So, scram! I've had enough of you and your crackpot inventions—"

"Ah," interrupted Pat triumphantly, "but this one is different! Wait till you see my Fourceps!"

"Forceps?" I said wonderingly. "But there's nothing unusual about forceps—"

"These are *fourceps*," corrected Pending gently, "not *forceps*. Ordinary forceps operate in three dimensions. *Mine* operate in the Fourth Dimension! Look—I'll show you!"

And before I could utter a word of protest, from his pocket he drew a weird-looking little gadget of chrome steel. It looked like a cross between a

pair of pinking-shears and a basting-fork—sort of like long-handled scissors except that the twin blades twisted off at giddy angles the eyes ached to follow.

So help me, you couldn't see the end of those shears or forceps or whatever they were! The prongs seemed to bend, to shrug—and vanish into thin air!

I gulped. "Hey, what makes here? I never saw anything like that before, Pat!"

"No, of course not!" acknowledged Pending. "There never *was* anything like this . . . until I inventulated it. Look, I'll show you how it works. I force the blades through the top of your desk—"

"Hey!" I cried. "Be careful! You'll scratch—"

"—Feel around—"

"You nitwit!" I bawled. "You've poked a hole in the top of my desk! I'll catch merry blue blazes for this!"

"—And, *presto*!" declaimed Pending grandiloquently, "I withdraw something from your desk drawer! But what is it? My goodness, Mr. Mallory, how remarkable! It appears to be a ration book of C type gasoline tickets! Mercy me! I thought you were entitled to only an A rating—"

"Gimme that!" I snarled, snatching it from his hand. "I'm just saving it for a—a stamp-collector friend of mine. Anyhow, what's the big idea

of busting in here and destroying Government property? Don't you know—"

Then I stopped in midsentence, my jaw dangling. For my angry gaze had swept the desk-top into which Pat had, a few moments before, thrust his probing instrument—and the mahogany surface was as smooth, as unbroken, as a bubble-dancer's costume!

"Well?" said Pending pleasantly.

"Not very," I moaned. "Pat, how in the world—"

"Will you give me an applicaceous form now?" Pending asked. "It's really vitically importulant, you see. Someone might anticipate my invention."

"Fourth Dimension!" I grasped at the one sane straw in a maelstrom of madness. "You said your gadget operates in the Fourth Dimension, Pat."

"That's right."

"And—and just what is the Fourth Dimension?"

"Why, an extension of Space at right angles to every other extension, of course," explained Pat.

"At right angles to—"

"Yes. Width is at right angles to length, isn't it? That makes two dimensions. Depth is at right angles to width and length. That makes three dimensions. Another direction, at right angles to width, length, and depth, enters the Fourth Dimension. It's very simple."

"You took the word," I said, "right out of my mouth. Would you mind giving that the once-over-lightly? With a dab of tonic at the temples."

"Maybe I can make it clearer by analogy," offered my red-headed nemesis. He tore a sheet from my memo pad, quickly sketched one of those floor-plan schematics architects use to lure prospective bungalow-builders into the ranks of mansion-mortgagees. In the center of this diagram he drew a tiny bag marked with a dollar sign.

"This," he explained, "is a bag of gold."

"Don't let the Treasury Department hear you," I told him. "Gold was

supposed to have been turned in years ago."

"And this"—he pointed to his masterpiece—"is a house."

"Doesn't look very substantial," I frowned, "or very roomy. Must be chilly in cold weather, with no roof."

"It is the home," said my adviser reprovingly, "of a Flatlander."

"Ah!" I nodded sagely. "Invaded country, eh? House was bombed. That accounts for the roof—" Then the double-take struck me. "Huh? Whazzat? A which-lander?"

"A Flatlander," explained Pat, "is a two-dimensional creature. He has only width and length; no depth. These two dimensions are the only ones he knows. He cannot conceive of any other. 'Thickness' is a word not in his dictionary."

"He lives and moves on a plane surface. In building a home, he needs only surround himself with four walls and he is protected."

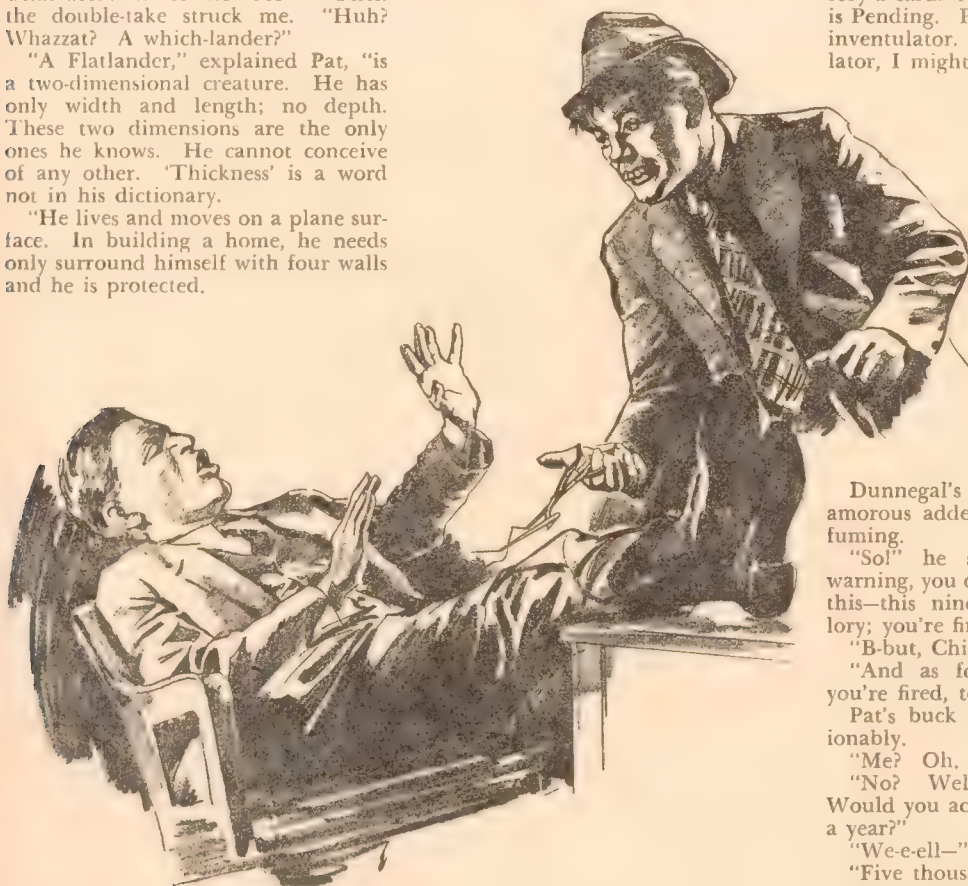
the Flatlander's home through the Third Dimension, so did my fourceps penetrate your desk through an angle we cannot see or clearly comprehend—the Fourth Dimension. It's really very simple."

What I might have said or done next I'll never know; for at that moment the office door banged open violently, and in charged the Big Boss, bug-eyed and breathless.

Norden bombsight!" Then for the first time he seemed to realize that a stranger had asked the question. He started, and turned to me. "Who—who is this man, Mallory?"

"You mean—er—Hec?" I laughed in what I hoped was a reassuring tone. "Oh, he's all right. An old pal of mine. Name of Quisleberry—Hector T. Quisle—"

Pending giggled. "Isn't Mr. Mallory a card? Always joking. My name is Pending. Patrick Pending. I'm an inventulator. The greatest inventulator, I might add, of all—"



I gulped. "Hey, what makes here? I never saw anything like that before, Pat! . . . Be careful!"

Dunnegal's wattles puffed like an amorous adder. He whirled on me, fuming.

"Sol" he snarled. "Despite my warning, you continue to hobnob with this—this nincompoop? Okay, Mallory; you're fired!"

"B-but, Chief—" I began miserably. "And as for you, Mr. Pending—you're fired, too!"

Pat's buck teeth gleamed companionably.

"Me? Oh, but I don't work here."

"No? Well, we'll soon fix that. Would you accept a position at \$3500 a year?"

"We-e-ell—" hesitated Pat.

"Five thousand?"

"That's very nice of you," said Pending. "Thank you, sir—"

"Good! Then you're hired. And now—you're fired!" The Chief made shooting motions with his hands. "So, go! Get out of here, both of you, before I—"

It was all sound and fury, signifying nothing except that the Old Man was scared spittleless. I reminded him gently: "The briefcase, Mr. Dunnegal? Where could you have left it?"

He stared at me haggardly.

"I don't know, Mallory. I—I fear it may have been at the Centralian consulate. I stopped by there for a moment after I left here. I remember laying the portfolio down—"

That's when I began to get the creepy-crawlies.

"The Centralian consulate!" I gasped. "But, yes—of course! You didn't just leave it—it was stolen!"

"As this diagram shows, the Flatlander has gone out, leaving his money at home. He thinks it perfectly safe. The windows are closed, the door bolted. No Flatland burglar can enter and steal the money."

"But—" said Pending triumphantly—"we can! Being creatures of a higher dimension—the Third Dimension—it is a simple matter for us to reach down, through a dimension our Flatlander never dreamed of, and pluck a bag of gold from the supposedly invulnerable house! Understand?"

"I'm groping," I conceded, "through the dark, glassily. But of course it's all hypothetical nonsense! What have the Flatlander's troubles got to do with your fourceps and my desk?"

"Everything," claimed the great inventulator simply. "As we entered

"Mallory!" he panted. "Mallory, tell me? My briefcase—did I leave it here?"

"Why, no, sir," I said. "You took it with you."

He groaned and tumbled heavily into a chair, burying his face in trembling hands.

"I was afraid so! It—it's gone!"

"Well, cheer up!" I consoled him.

"Maybe the office force will chip in and get you a new one next Christmas."

"It's not the briefcase I'm worrying about," he retorted. "It's what was in it."

"What was in it?" put in Pat.

"Plans!" wailed the Boss. "Vital blueprints. Plans and specifications for an important military secret weapon, a new and improved form of the

Everybody knows the Centralians are Axis sympathizers!"

The Boss nodded bleakly.

"Yes, Mallory. I realize that. Oh, Lord, what *have* I done! My carelessness may cost us not only a vital secret, but the war—"

"The question isn't what you've done. It's what are we going to do. Come on! Let's barge over there and get the briefcase back!"

And I started for the door. But the Old Man stopped me. "It's no use, Mallory. I did go back there immediately. The consul disclaimed any knowledge of the briefcase's whereabouts. He said I took it with me when I left."

"And—and you believe him?"

"Frankly, no. Because, you see, while I was talking to him the second time, I found *this* on the floor—" A card appeared in Dunnegal's hand. It was one of those identification doogummies you stick in the outer pocket of a portfolio. It bore the imprint: *United States Patent Office*. "Of course it could have fallen out, but in view of the circumstances it seems more likely it was torn out when the briefcase was ripped open by excited searchers—"

"You're cooking with oil now, Chief," I assured him. "This clinches it. There's no doubt about it. Those rascals swiped your poke and eased you out before you missed it. Now they're getting ready to pass on the info to their Axis pals. And we've got to stop them. . . . I've got it! The Army!"

I REACHED for the phone, but again Dunnegal stopped me.

"No, Mallory! We can't do that. We mustn't involve our Government in a diplomatic scandal."

"Why not? This is war!"

"Yes. But we're not at war with Centralia. So long as they remain a neutral nation, we are compelled to extend a diplomatic immunity to their representatives."

"But they have the plans!"

"Suppose," smiled the Chief wanly, "they do not? If our Government were to be caught in such an awkward position, the diplomatic repercussions would rock the world. No nation in the world would ever again place credence in the sincerity of our Atlantic Charter. We would lose all the good will and confidence inspired by our benevolent invasion of Africa, and our championship of the rights of small nations—"

"He's right, Mr. Mallory," chimed in Pat. "We can't enter the Centralian consulate violatiously. Oh, the results might be disastrous!"

"Then the—the F.B.I.?" I offered feebly.

"Too slow," mourned Dunnegal. "Oh, I don't mean the organization,

or the men in it. They're right on their toes. But whatever we are, to do must be accomplished in a matter of hours—not days. The Centralians undoubtedly have some secret means of communication with our enemy; once they get off their message, we've lost."

"But there must be *some* way—"

He pounded his brow like a drummer beating a washboard. "They've undoubtedly put the plans under lock for safekeeping. Who but a professional crackman could help us out of this predicament?"

The answer was obvious. But somehow when it came it surprised even me.

"Who?" said Pat Pending mildly.

"Why, me. I can."

"You!" Dunnegal croaked the word. Then remembrance of his anger returned. "Nonsense! Now you're talking like a dime-novel hero. What can you do?"

"Yes, Pat," I demanded, "what *can* you do?"

"Mr. Dunnegal," said Pat placidly, "thinks the plans are in a safe. Well—a safe is a three-dimensional object."

"Well?"

"And I have my fourceps!"

There it was, plain as an anteater's proboscis. It was a solution of such simplicity that I gasped aloud. "Pat! It might work! It might just possibly work!"

"Work? Of course it will," said Pending.

The Boss was staring at both of us as if we had just flown out of a cuckoo clock. "What," he blazed, "are you two talking about? Forceps? What about forceps?"

"Not *forceps*," I corrected; "*four*-ceps, from the numeral of the same name. Tell him, Pat."

"Well," explained Pat, "my new invention employs a tesseractaceous diversionizing of angulities, and therewith is able to interspacise its corporeosity within the atomical transecurities of solid bodies. You see?"

The Boss stared at me starkly. "Sanskrit?" he asked in an awed whisper.

I shook my head. I had experienced this before. On all subjects save the construction or operation of his brainpapooses, Pat Pending could talk with reasonable clarity, but whenever he tried to elucidate the whys and wherefores of his inventions, incomprehensibles poured from his lips like water from a drake's dorsal.

"Never mind," I said. "Show him, Pat."

"Very well." Pat drew the scissors-like gadget from his pocket and approached Dunnegal, snipping it menacingly. "It works like this, you see. I merely insert the blades through your coat—"

"Hey!" cried the Boss. "Stop that!"

"—Feel around—"

"You madman! You've cut a hole in my coat—"

"—And, *presto*," announced Pat proudly, "I withdraw your watch!"

He laid the timepiece gently on the desk. The Chief stared at it with stalked eyes, gingerly fingered unblemished tweed. He choked, "But—but my coat was buttoned! My watch was in my vest pocket! How did you do that?"

"Why," said Pending modestly, "as I told you before, I exterpolyzed the quadrimentional tongs through a molecularous contravening—"

"How he did it doesn't matter," I interrupted. "The thing is, he *did* it! And he can pull the same trick again on the Centralian strongbox! Come on; let's go!"

And we went.

PERHAPS I should have mentioned before that all this shenanigan took place in late afternoon. If so, excuse it, please. I'm just a minion in your Uncle Sammy's offices, not a professional scribbler. Anyhow, I'll tell you now that the shades of night were falling fast as we galloped down the dinnertime-deserted streets of Philadelphia on our way to the building wherein the Centralian consul maintained his office.

And, of course, it being after six, the building was closed up tighter than a glamour girl's girdle by the time we got there. The Boss rattled the door by the simple expedient of grabbing the handle and trembling. No soap.

"Locked!" he groaned. "Oh, this is bad!"

"No," demurred Pending. "On the contrary, it's good news for us. If the building is locked, that means they were unable to do anything this afternoon. It offers us more time to retrieve the plans."

"Time to call in the F.B.I.," I said excitedly.

"Hardly that. They may have planned to return after dinner and finish their work. We must take advantage of this opportunular situizing."

"But if we can't get in—" complained Dunnegal.

"Oh, but we can. It's very simple." Pat placed his fourceps at the lock, twisted briskly. There came a *snap* as the nightlatch swung free. Pat pressed, and the door opened. "You see?"

The Boss didn't, but he said nothing. Swiftly, like three conspirators in a ten-twenty-third melodrama, we slipped into the darkened building and crept up even darker stairs to the consular offices on the third floor. Here again, after a moment of cautious listening to make sure the dump was empty, Pat performed his quadridimensional quackery—and this time,

when the door obligingly eased open, we had reached our goal.

Dunnegal, who knew the layout, led the way to an inner chamber. There, against the far wall, stood one of those old-fashioned box safes. Dunnegal pointed nervously.

"If it's here at all," he whispered tensely, "that's where it will be!"

"Okay, Patrick," I murmured. "From now on it's your pigeon. Make with the mechanical magic."

Pat needed no urging. Without a word he fell to his knees, brought forth the fourceps, and slipped the shimmering blades through the thick-walled safe as if its steel-and-concrete reinforcement were so much Liederkrantz. The Chief and I waited breathlessly while slow seconds oozed by like sorghum in winter. And then—

"A-a-a-h!" sighed Pat.

"Got it?" I yelped.

Everything happened at once. Pat Pending cried gleefully, "Here it is!"

Then from the doorway rasped a voice: "Ha! What is this? Sneak-thieves!"

"I've got something. Just a minute—" He twisted. The fourceps withdrew, holding between its blades a bulky wad of documents. "Oh, darn!" said Pat petulantly. "I must have missed it. I'll try again."

Once more he plunged the tines into the safe, as the Boss, curious, flashed a tiny key-light on the papers. A cry escaped his lips.

"Gad! Mallory, look here! These documents are dynamite! They prove conclusively what we have long had reason to believe—that the Centralian Government is sympathetic to the Axis cause! They are preserving their neutrality only so they may spy on our war effort!"

Then everything happened at once. Pat Pending cried gleefully, "Here it is! This time I've got it!" And he yanked the missing briefcase from the safe. Then his ruddy features saluted in the sudden, startling glare of illumination. And from the doorway rasped a voice with the imperious crackle of a bull-whip:

"Ha! And what is this? Sneak-thieves!"

We whirled like a trio of tops. Standing behind us, gripping a snub-nosed bit of ugliness much too capably, stood the Centralian consul!

Right along about here, I'd like to be able to say I was as cool and calm as the proverbial cucumber. Well, maybe I was—more or less. My feet felt like overgrown ice-cubes, and the

unswallowable lump in my throat was at least the size of a full-grown *cucumis sativus*.

Pat didn't look any too happy, either. His jaw hung like the shutters of a haunted house. He couldn't have oozed a word through that gap for a million dollars. The Chief was the only one of us who could talk. And his effort set an all-time high for insufficiency.

"Oh, hellol!" he said.

"Sneak-thieves!" repeated the consul. "Robbers, eh? Well, my uneasy culprits, you shall regret this!"



He took a step forward, leveled the automatic.

Dunnegal found his voice—quick.

"Don't!" he yelped. "Don't shoot! We're not sneak-thieves. Surely you recognize me? I visited you this afternoon. I'm Dunnegal of the Patent Office!"

Tiny darts of amusement glinted in the other's eyes.

"That," he purred, "is a lie. Surely no official of the United States Government would be so mad as to break into the private offices of a neutral foreign power. You do resemble Mr. Dunnegal. But such a coincidence—"

"YOU prevaricaceous murderizer!" That was Pat Pending, shouting in outrage. "You recognize him very well. But you know we've found out about your filthy espionage"—he waved the retrieved briefcase defiantly—"and you want an excuse to shoot us; that's all!"

The consul smiled negligently. "Ridiculous! But suppose that were my intention?"

"You'll never get away with it," threatened the Boss heavily. "I'm an

important man; and Mallory is well known around Philadelphia. Mr. Pending is a great inventor—I mean, great inventor. If we disappear—"

"But you will not disappear," laughed the undercover man significantly. "Your bodies will be found in the morning—in the Delaware. Your deaths will be so mysterious, no?" Then his eyes, returning to the briefcase, darkened. A frown creased his forehead. "But what is this? You have the portfolio—yet the safe is unopened. How—"

"That," I snarled, "is one thing you'll never learn. Pat, smash that gadget into a million pieces—quick! Before he gets his hooks on it."

But Pending had other ideas. He rose and showed his fourceps to our captor. "Why," he said, "with these. Do you want to see them?"

And he took a step forward.

The Centralian shifted his automatic tautly to cover Pat. "Careful!" he warned. "Not too close, or—"

"Pat!" I cried. "Don't show him that thing! It's a military secret."

Pending shrugged. "Of course. But I discovered it. I have a right

to sell it to the highest bidder." He glanced at the Centralian greedily. "Perhaps your country would like to buy it?"

"Perhaps," conceded our enemy cagily. "But how does it work? What does it do?"

"I'll show you," said Pat eagerly. "You see—"

"You scoundrel!" roared Dunnegal. "You traitor!"

"Quiet," warned the consul. "This man interests me. Well, go on! You were saying—"

"It goes through solid objects," said Pending, "like this—"

He moved it toward the consul, who leaped back, eyes blazing dangerously. "No, you don't! Keep your distance! If you touch me with those blades—"

"I'm not trying to touch you," said Pat plaintively. "But, gosh, I've got to have some object to demonstrate on, haven't I? Some tangaceous object, like—like your gun, for instance. See here!"

And with a swift, clean motion he slipped the blades into, through, and out of the automatic. Something

solid hit the floor with a clattering *thunk*. As it did so, Pat Pending dived after it. His voice lifted in a scream:

"Get him! His gun's empty! *Oh!*"

His startled cry was drowned in a deafening blast as the automatic spat lead, flame and fury. But there came only that single shot. In vain the consul squeezed the grip again and again and yet again. Nothing happened!

Disarmed, then, and suddenly panic-stricken, our foe leaped toward the door. But the Boss is a pretty spry gander for his years, and I wasn't an All-State mention for nothing. We hit him high, and we hit him low,

fourceps, in the jaws of which were gripped a pellet of lead.

"That," he said, "is not necessular, thanks. I took out the bullet."

Then he passed out, cold.

AFTERWARD, when a medico had bandaged Pat's wound—meanwhile complaining bitterly about bullet holes with no bullets in them—we



and we weren't too careful how hard or how often we hit. The net result was that by the time we finished playing pat-a-cake, the object of our attentions was stiffer than a celluloid collar.

It was then we remembered Pat Pending, and turned to find him sitting on the floor, an unsightly blot staining his arm below the shoulder.

I cried, "Pat—you're shot! We must get you to the hospital immediately; get that bullet out—"

Pat grinned feebly, and held up for our inspection a red-stained pair of

adjourned to an all-night bar for a drop of Four Star nerve tonic.

It was there that Pat admitted: "I completely forgot that automatics always have one bullet in the barrel. I thought I was making the gun useless when I removed the clip."

"Next time you go lead-fishing," I suggested, "you'd better bait both hooks. But everything turned out all right, eh, Boss? We've got the briefcase back, and papers that will give every Centralian in America his by-by visa. They must be dopes, backing a horse—or a portion thereof—like Hitler."

The Chief smiled companionably.

"Yes, Mallory, it was a good job well done. And the best part of it is that it was accomplished with no publicity or notoriety. The Patent Office emerged from this encounter, I am gratified to see, at no cost to its reputation or—"

"Cost?" interrupted Pat. "You surely haven't forgotten the two hundred dollars?"

Dunnegal gasped:

"Two hundred dollars, Pending? What two hundred dollars?"

"Well," temporized Pat, "\$192.31, to be exact."

Dunnegal stared at him, then at me.

"What in the world is this man talking about?"

"The money," said Pat stubbornly, "the Patent Office owes me. You hired me at a salary of \$5,000 per year, didn't you?"

"Why—er—I suppose I did. But—"

"Then you fired me," pointed out Pat Pending, "without the usual two weeks' notice. In that event, according to Civil Service laws, you are required to give me my two weeks' salary in advance."

"Wha-a-at!" bawled Dunnegal.

"You must be crazy! I never heard of such a—a hold-up! I won't do it!"

Pat sighed.

"I was afraid you'd adopt that attitude, so I didn't take any chances. I took the liberty of removing your wallet from your inside pocket a few minutes ago, and I've taken the money rightfully mine. Thank you very much, Mr. Dunnegal."

He tossed a limp leather lump to the table-top. Dunnegal spluttered futilely. And me? I grinned.

"Might as well surrender, Boss," I advised him. "In the language of communiqués: *A superior fourceps has attacked our position, and has the situation under control!*"

Powder for

Flags of our Fathers—IX

by H. BEDFORD JONES

*Illustrated by
John Fulton*

EVEN for the lonely Maine coast, Taunton was a lonely place and afar from everywhere; a tiny village of a half-dozen houses, a tiny harbor at the creek-mouth, a tiny flash of green among dark rocks backed by gloomy forest.

Derek Edwards had been fifteen when he went out with his father and brothers in the fishing sloop, and a St. Johns' schooner Jamaica-bound ran down the sloop in thick fog. Derek was pulled aboard her; no one else.

He was nineteen when he came back to Taunton. This was in the fall of 1774. A Beverly cod-fisher put him ashore, a gaunt wasted shape, man grown and bearded, with a painted sea-chest. The fever had laid him low in Cuba, and he was barely half alive; yet upon him like a shadow sat a tight-lipped masterful air of hard authority.

Those four years in the West Indies had taught him what life was about and what it meant, as well as any man of thirty. Maine men are like that, in a calloused youth.

The evening he got back, he sat before the fire in old Louey's cabin at the upper end of the tiny settlement, next to Edwards' house. Louey

had come wandering out of Canada twelve years ago, after the final French war; no one knew the least thing about him. He was a quiet little man with gray hair and goatee and a dancing devil in his black eyes; but there was no evil in him and great book-learning.

"I can get well here," Edwards said. "I had to come home or die, Louey. I've been far and done man's work. I've got English guineas and Spanish dollars in my sea-chest, but I'd give them and my right arm to boot if only my mother was alive."

"It was last winter she died," Louey replied. "The house and all in it has remained untouched. You're better off than some men who have lost home and family to strangers."

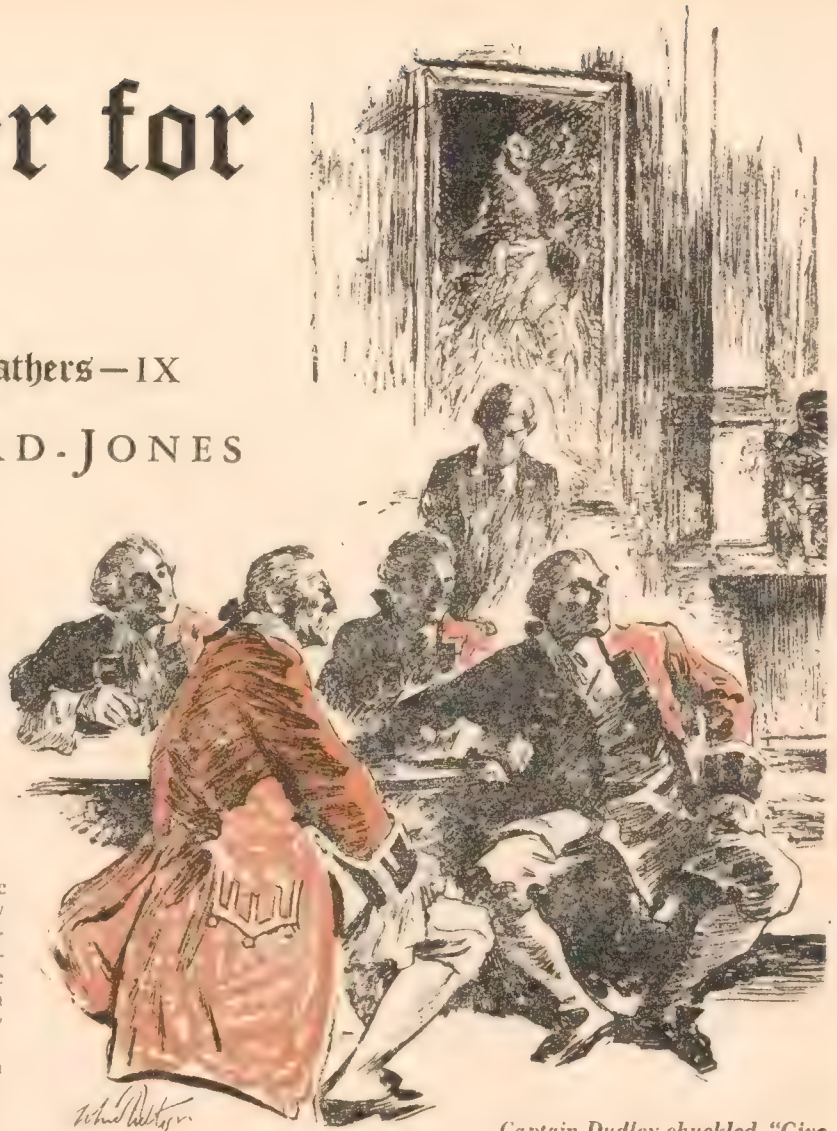
Meaning himself? Edwards wondered, but avoided questioning the older man as to his meaning.

"Does that Englishman still live on Hightree Island?" he asked.

Louey nodded over his pipe.

"Rathesay? Yes; like a lord, a baron of old time! There is something about this country here that lends itself to baronial majesty—"

He was off, launching into one of his interminable wise discourses. The scholarly speech fascinated Edwards, as it had when he was a boy. From the earliest days said Louey, white settlers along these coasts had been fond of playing at lordship; like St. Castine, who married an Indian princess and lived in state. So it was with the Rathesays on Hightree Island, up



Captain Dudley chuckled. "Give

the General



him a dozen of the cat, Bose, if he shirks." Bose touched his forehead. "Aye, sir. And the old one, sir?"

the coast; whether English or Scots, they were grand folk.

"Not that they've much to be proud of," went on Louey. "They took it from the French during the wars—oh, thirty years back! That's the way with our grandest folk. They seldom bear investigation. That's the meaning of the word *history*, lad. 'Inquiry,' in the Greek."

"You speak fine English, for a Frenchman," said Edwards. "I always thought so."

"Oh, I lived in London once!" said Louey. "Foul foggy nest!"

This was the only mention Louey ever made of his past.

The old man's shack was miserable. Derek fetched him down to the Edwards house, as winter drew on, for

company. By canoe or snowshoe or fish boat, Louey was spry as a boy; they fitted together well enough, had hot argument but little anger, and were a constant delight and wonder to each other. Derek marveled at the wisdom and learning and woods-skill of the old man, Louey at the impetuous high spirit of the lad, and his adventures in the Caribees.

So winter passed, the ice went out, the spring sun warmed earth and sea, summer waxed golden, and Derek Edwards became lusty and sound once more. Youth and health came back to him full measure, and little Taunton began to irk him. His money had slipped away, though he bought a fishing-boat up the coast with some of it, a bluff, stanch bit of a boat.

It was out of the world here. Not until September reddened the woods did they hear of the furious events to the southward in Massachusetts, of rebellion and armies and a man named Washington who held the British besieged in Boston. This was a thunderclap of news to the tiny settlement with its half-dozen families.

A New Bedford schooner, sadly battered by storm, put into the little cove for repairs and gave full information. From her Edwards learned of the storm of men bursting on the Colonies, of the ragged armies under Washington and their bitter sad need of powder and arms and everything else.

"What's more," said the New Bedford skipper, "General Washington is

making him a Navy. I expect you folks never heard of Cap'n Manley of Boston—"

"Cap'n John Manley?" broke out Edwards. "I know him! Had dealings with him in Santiago last year. He offered me a mate's berth, but the fever was on me bad. What about him?"

"Well, Washington has made him cap'n in the Army, and he's to have charge of the hull Massachusetts Navy—a Navy of five or six schooners." The New Bedford man grinned. "I hear they aim to work up and down the coast."

"And fight?"

"Fight or grab. Why, Cap'n Boughton went out o' Beverly in the *Hannah* on the fifth o' this month and was back on the seventh with a captured Britisher! Yes, sir. Fact is we seen a schooner offshore yesterday, heading north; looked like the *Lynch*. Probably going to find some guns and powder in Canady."

"Does Washington need cannon and powder so badly?" Louey demanded.

"So bad he can taste 'em," was the reply. "Easy enough to raise men for the Army, you bet, after Bunker Hill; but everything's short. When it comes to cannon, they just aint."

Louey jumped up excitedly. He began to pace up and down.

"And you say one of those schooners is close by! I must think about this. I must talk to you again."

INDEED, he went aboard with the New Bedford skipper and was gone all morning.

Edwards paid no attention; he was busy with sudden great thoughts of his own.

"Derekl!" Louey proposed abruptly. "Let's overhaul the boat and fishing-gear this afternoon and go out for some fun."

"Fish won't be running this late," said Edwards.

"Plenty of mackerel and coast cod. Besides, it may be our last chance, with winter coming on."

"All right," Derek agreed. But that afternoon, while they were overhauling the gear, he ducked his head at the old man.

"I'm going, Louey, I'm going!" he said. "I'm well now, and fit. I can do my share."

"Ah, *la guerre!*" Louey nodded sadly. "The British have not hurt you. Why, then?"

"My people, Louey! It's war, war! We got to fight for our rights. Rebels, they call us; can't help that. I'd go on this New Bedford craft, only she's outward bound. Yes, I'll have to find Cap'n Manley, down to Boston. He'll take me on, quick enough."

"Maybe we'll meet one of those Navy schooners," said Louey. "Feels

like weather, Derek. Shall we stay home or go?"

"The sloop's sound," said Edwards scornfully. "Who cares for a capful o' wind? Yes, sir, before snow flies I'm going! Sure we'll get off tomorrow. Why not?"

THEY got away next day, figuring on a two-day trip past the islands up the coast. That evening, however, found them with the lug close-reefed and a howler coming out of the Gut of Canseau. No use trying for home; better run for the lee of the islands, said Derek. It was a chancy business by night.

However, they made a lee, rode out the darkness in miserable discomfort, and with dawn found themselves off the islands with the wind a howling blast. Shelter and a shore-camp was the sensible thing. This would be a three-day blow and a hard one; Lord help any small craft caught off these rockbound shores!

"I'll make for Hightree," said Derek, and swung the tiller. "We needn't trouble the Britishers there; it'll give us the best shelter."

They flew on into the grayness, only a scrap of low sandy islet visible here and there. Louey broke into sudden excitement.

"More to larboard, to larboard!" he cried. "You're making straight for a long shoal off that little island! Come about, quick!"

"Hello! If you know these waters, take over! Why didn't you say so before this?"

Louey squeezed in at the tiller as the spray flew, and they tore onward. To the astonishment of Edwards, who had never known Louey to be much of a sailor, the old man displayed an intimate acquaintance with the shoals and islands.

Hightree was a rocky outcrop of some size, over a mile in length and thickly wooded; a dense cluster of huge pines occupied the higher ground at the south end. Under those pines lay a little harbor that promised shelter now, although open to any gale from west or south. The sloop was coming down on the island from the northeast, almost before the wind, and Louey seemed heading slap for the rocks.

Derek made no comment; it was evident that his companion knew what he was about. They missed the north tip of the island by a cable's length, came about smartly, and darted in past a long shoal that broke the force of the seas, to scrape on a strip of sandy beach. When they pulled up the little craft, Edwards glanced around and chuckled.

"So you knew all the time this landing was here, you old fraud! I could have sworn this coast was solid rock!"

Louey shrugged. "I was here once. It is good shelter, but too near the house."

"What, the house? Why, that's at the other end of the island, on the cove! This is perfect, Louey! We have the whole place to ourselves."

It was perfect, indeed; a mere sliver of sand amid tumbled rocks and trees, protected from the howling blast that whipped the branches to leeward, and from the rolling comb-ers.

A long-delayed meal was the first objective. Louey got out his fire-bag and fell to work over birch punk and bark. Edwards cleaned a couple of their fish and prepared tea. With a batch of salt-sorry biscuit, it made a good meal.

The morning was coming up leaden and a wild scud of spindrift whirled overhead as the long rollers roared and pounded on the rocks; but here beside the dark rim of trees all was contentment, and the feel of safety and comfort was heart-warming.

The fire was banked to windward with small boulders; the blaze quickly dried them. Their meal over, the two men scooped hollows in the sand and stretched out at ease, pipes alight, in glorious idleness.

LOUHEY reminisced of the bitter days and hard fighting along these shores, when the French had owned everything from Pemaquid north to Acadie, only to lose it inch by inch, and Canada to boot. In those times no mercy was shown to any; it was like Indian fighting—*vae victis*, woe to the conquered!

"The new war will be like that," said Edwards thoughtfully. "They'll show no mercy. Some will stick by the old country, others by rebellion."

"If you have not the flag of England to fight for, what have you?" queried Louey.

"A new flag. That New Bedford man said something about a Massachusetts flag."

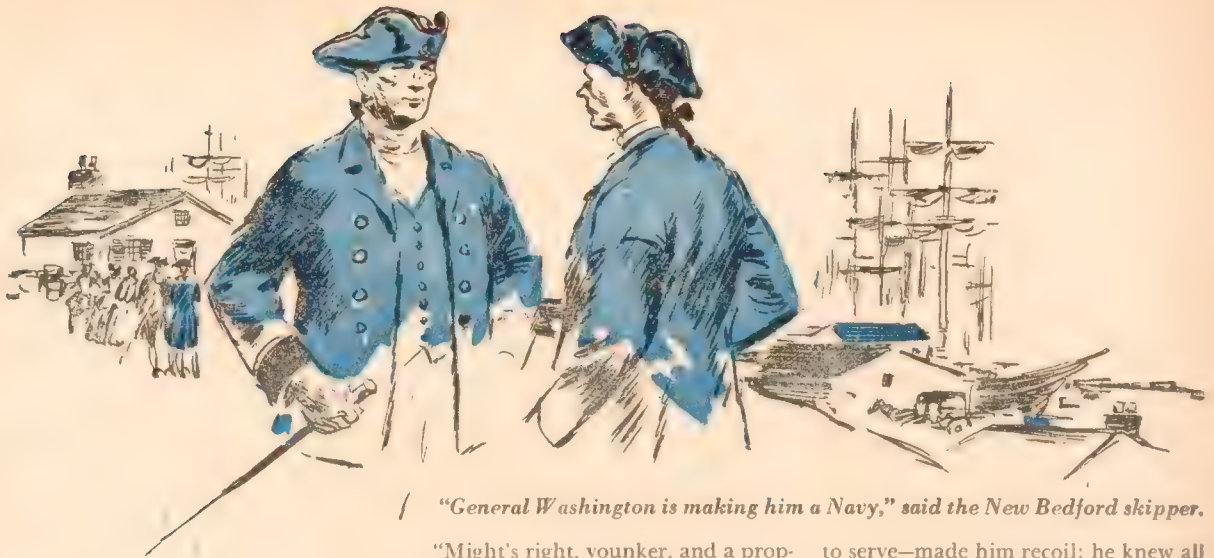
"A codfish!" scoffed Louey. "The cod was always the emblem of the Bostonnais!"

"No. What was it? A pine tree, I think he said."

"Lad, I meant not a flag literally, but as representing institutions and a cause. You have none. Wrongs to right, perhaps injustice—that's all. You yourself would go for no other reason than because the Colonies are resisting force with force."

"That's reason enough."

"To fight, to hate, to kill your fellow-men? That's the devil's cause. What said the poet? 'Men's evil manners live in brass; their virtues we write in water.' Too true, lad! Hate lives in monuments of brass and needs no cause."



“General Washington is making him a Navy,” said the New Bedford skipper.

Edwards scowled at the dark gray sea. Louey, he knew, was pricking at him in sly jest, yet the old Frenchman did have an argument; and he could put none into words.

“Then you’d have me sit on my heels in Taunton?” he snapped.

Louey chuckled.

“My faith, I’d go to war with you if I could! But not in hate; rather, in high resolve. And I’ve reason enough to hate the British,” he added, his face darkening. “More than you. More than any man, perhaps. Yet—hatred cankers the soul, Derek! I’ve learned to outgrow it, to rise above it. I’d fight the British gladly if I could—”

He broke off abruptly. Edwards glanced up, then leaped to his feet, staring.

Half a dozen men armed with pistol and cutlass broke out from the fringing trees, men in jackets and bell-leg pantaloons and shiny tarpaulin hats of British tars. Their leader was a stalwart fellow wearing the chain and silver-coil pipe of a boatswain, who spoke out bluntly.

“Ha! Wood-smoke on the wind, says the Laird, and his old nose told him true! Well, you rascals, what do you on private property? Spies, no doubt! Rebel spies, eh?”

“Don’t be a fool, bosun,” said Edwards. “We’re mainland fishermen sheltering from the gale. We’re from Taunton on the coast.”

“Never heard of the place. But you’re a likely rogue! Bosun, says you, and Bose it is. Well, you’re on Rathesay land, and it’s for the Laird to decide, so we’ll march you along to face him.”

“Why, this is monstrous!” burst out Edwards in angry dismay, as he stared at the circle of grinning faces. “We’re free men—you’ve no right—”

“Might’s right, younker, and a proper seaman if I’m any judge of men!” Bose relaxed, got out a pipe and pouch, and stooped for a brand from the fire. He was a jovial, hearty but mahogany-hard fellow; neither he nor his men displayed any animosity. He gave Edwards a long hard look, then grinned.

“Aye, born under a gun—every hair a rope yarn, every tooth a marlin-spike; tar in your blood and every finger a hook!” said he. “If the Laird says the word, we’ll clap you into His Majesty’s service and make a man of you!”

“You will, like hell!” exploded Edwards. “I’ll have none of it!”

Bose nodded tolerantly. “Many a man has said the same, and a few dozen with the cat fetched him around shipshape. Now step along, both of you. You’re on Rathesay land and must come along for judgment, else we’ll have to haul you in as prisoners. Come along, now!”

EDWARDS tensed, but old Louey touched his arm and spoke in quiet warning.

“Easy does it, Derek! No sense in showing fight and getting a broken head. Come along as they bid. After all, Rathesay’s within his rights, and we’re trespassers.”

“Why, Gran’ther, there’s the right proper spirit!” Bose cried heartily. “A pity we can’t press you into service likewise; but gray is gray, and Cap’n Dudley hath respect for age. Step out, now, step out like gentlemen!”

They obeyed. Edwards was in bitter despairing rebellion, but gave no sign of it.

Not the summons from Rathesay; this was nothing. But men of the Royal Navy—how had they got here? This was the amazing thing. Thought of being “pressed”—forced willy-nilly

to serve—made him recoil; he knew all too well what this meant.

In other years he had heard much talk about the “Laird,” as Rathesay was termed in these parts; talk from his father and others, about the high-handed manner in which Hightree Island was ruled. And, said they, the Frenchman who had ruled it before Rathesay had been no less high and mighty.

Louey, sucking at his pipe, talked with the men around. They were good-humored rascals and answered his questions freely, while the party tramped along beneath the trees, the wind howling far overhead.

The explanation was simple. They belonged to H.M.S. *Perseus*, temporarily laid up at Halifax. Under Captain Dudley and a lieutenant of the frigate, they were crewing a big “snow,” laden with Army stores and powder, south to General Gage at Boston. The snow—the word rhymed with “cow”—had been wrecked aloft and lost her top-hamper, and had crawled into this Hightree haven for shelter from the blow and to refit her rigging.

There she lay to speak for herself, as they came over the hill and sighted the little cove through the trees. A stubby vessel, her two square-rigged masts and lateen mizzen stripped and bare, boats plying betwixt her and shore, and work going on. The great house on the rising ground behind the harbor showed beneath towering pines. A darkly timbered house, half of boulders, half of logs; a heavy, massive structure built to last forever.

“You could tell a Frenchman built it,” said Louey, “because it has a second floor. No Frenchman will sleep next the ground if he could help it.”

Even thus late in the fall, with snow flying, remains of lordly gardens enclosed the house. Small log struc-

tures appeared back among the trees, where lived the servants; half a dozen of them, said one of the seamen, outnumbering the gentry they served.

But as the party approached the house, Edwards looked only at the shore, where men were laboring furiously as were others aboard the snow; yards were being cut and shaped, and lines rove. From the stubby ship came the thin screams of a man spread-eagled at a grating.

"A flogging for Job Perkins again," somebody said, and all laughed. "That'll learn him to smoke his pipe over a water-tub, according to regulations!"

They waited outside the house while Bose went in. He reappeared.

"Two of you fetch 'em in, lads. The others, back to work!"

In they went, past massive doors loopholed for muskets, and on to a great room that was gloomy despite the huge log-fire blazing in the hooded fireplace. From the shadows came glints of silver; the colors of old portraits showed about the walls. It was like an ancient castle hall; yet Rathesay had won the place from some Frenchman, only thirty years back.

FOUR men sat about a table, with churchwarden pipes after a late breakfast; a servant in knee-breeches held a candle for the long pipes. Two of the men were naval officers, a burly red-faced captain, a trim dandified lieutenant with thin features and striking eyes; the other two were the Laird and his son.

Old Rathesay was white-haired and erect as a ramrod, his harsh bony visage set with arrogantly glittering eyes of bright blue; the very look of him was a slap in the face, so stiff was he with intolerant pride. The son, a man in his late forties, was equally stalwart; but his dull and heavy features showed a certain weakness and mean cruelty and passion.

Bose stood waiting, not venturing to speak until ordered. Captain Dudley was talking with an overbearing and brutal manner that seemed to be the key to the man's character.

"Aye, we're fully informed about this Washington's Navy, as they call it—four or five beggarly schooners manned by farmers. The insolent rebels commission their ragged fleet from the Massachusetts Government. They even have a flag from the same source—a green pine tree on a white ground, with some sort of motto—"

"One broadside from the *Perseus*," said the lieutenant, whose voice was as brisk as his eyes, "would blow their entire Navy to smithereens, and they know it. Rebels or not, they have courage, and I admire them for it!"

"Quite true, My Lord, but we haven't the *Perseus* here," the Laird said acidly. "Report says these rascals

are landing and looting His Majesty's subjects on all sides. What's to save Hightree if they come here? You should leave me a battery, Dudley, and men to man it. There was a gun-battery here before I took the place, but the guns had disappeared when I came."

"We have only six nine-pounders aboard the snow, and are short-handed to boot," Captain Dudley said. "Better move your plate and goods up to St. John's or Halifax."

"Damme if I will!" barked the old Laird. "By the strong hand I took this place, and I'll hold it by the same,

and David after me! That scoundrelly French who was installed here—Sieur des Forges; he called himself *seigneur*—had a grant from the French King. I killed him and his son to boot, and the island's mine. Will I let a pack of scurvy rebels frighten me off? Not likely! I want a battery of guns to command the harbor!"

"You couldn't hold it against any force; a landing could be made elsewhere, and this house taken from the rear," rejoined Dudley. His eye fell on the group. "Hal! Here are these rascally spies now. Well, Bose? Did they resist? Speak up, man!"





Men armed with pistol and cutlass broke upon them. Their leader spoke out bluntly: "Well, you rascals, what do you on private property?"

Bose did so. Edwards felt the hard intolerant gaze of the Laird searching him while the report was made. He met the striking eyes of the lieutenant—a lieutenant who was addressed as "My Lord"—and found them neither intolerant nor hostile. Old Louey, his wrinkled face and goatce rimed and roughed with salt, attracted no attention.

Old Rathesay said curtly:

"Fishermen, eh? One good seaman for you, Dudley. Put him to serve the King."

"Aye," said the Captain.

The Laird went on speaking: "That'll teach these mainland rascals to keep off my property—"

"Laird or no Laird, you can't bestow men like cattle!" lashed out Edwards abruptly. "Do you think yourself God Almighty because you stole this island?"

"Dereck, Dereck lad, I warned you!" came a despairing gasp from Louey.

Edwards ignored it. "Such men as you turn peaceful lands to rebellion!" he swept on angrily, while the grim stark eye of the Laird looked him up and down. "You can't seize honest

men seeking refuge from storm, and treat them like slaves! If it irks you that we took shelter here, then say so; we'll take our boat and go. But to seize free men defies all the laws of hospitality and decency."

Three of the four men at the table broke into a gale of laughter.

"So speaks armed rebellion, Dudley!" cried David Rathesay. "A spirited rogue, what?"

"Egad, the cat will tame him!" chuckled Captain Dudley. "Take him aboard, Bose. Give him a dozen if he shirks or makes trouble."

"Aye, sir." Bose touched his forehead. "And the old one, sir?"

"I want none of him. He's your problem, Rathesay."

Derek Edwards stood white and shaken, incredulous, dismayed, furious. The Laird surveyed Louey over his long pipestem.

"Where from, old man?"

"From Taunton, My Lord," said Louey in a humble voice. "A little mainland cove."

"How did you rascals know of that landing on the western side of the island?"

"Why, Your Lordship, I've been there often, back in the old days." To the surprise of Edwards, Louey spoke in the right New England twang. "That was long years ago when I was young and there were Frenchmen here. I remember I helped them hide the cannon."

There was an odd silence. Edwards, who knew very well that Louey was lying, looked at him in surprise. The Laird spoke quite softly.

"So! And do you remember, old man, where those cannon were hidden?"

"Ah, Your Worship, 'tis a mortal long time back!" quavered Louey. "They were big guns, and there were kegs of powder laid away with 'em."

"Ha!" Captain Dudley sat up. His voice rang out explosively. "Guns, is it? Guns! I'll handle this, Rathesay. By God, I know how to manage these pestilent Americans! Bose!"

"Aye, sir?"

"Take those two fellows aboard. Give the young 'un two dozen with the cat, well laid on. Then trice up the old 'un and give him a dozen, unless his memory wakes up before. If it doesn't, give him an extra dozen. Ha! We'll show these colonial—"

The lieutenant stood up suddenly. His voice chimed like a bell.

"Why, Dudley, what a damned brutal blackguard you are!" said he, without heat. "Upon my word, you turn my stomach with your crass ignorance. 'Tis such work as this that makes rebels of honest men."

WITH a roar, the Captain came out of his chair.

"Lord James Percy you may be, but by heaven I'm your superior officer, and I'll have none of your impudence!" he cried hotly.

The lieutenant turned to him and bowed slightly. "We're not aboard ship, Captain Dudley," said he. "Here I owe you nothing except the disdain of a gentleman for a scoundrel. You're an unholy ruffian in office, a brute who is misplaced, a disgrace to the uniform you wear and the flag you serve under. I trust, sir, that I make myself clear?"

Purple with fury, the Captain moved as though to strike him. Like

a flash, the old Laird was out of his chair and between them, overawing Dudley.

"Gentlemen, in time of war we cannot have such actions," said he. "Besides, I'm in authority here, not you."

Lord James turned to him and bowed again. Cold and clear was his bell-like voice.

"I would not be ungrateful to my host; God forbid! But this young fisherman is right. *Seigneur* you may be here, Rathesay; many a jackanapes in the old world comes here and sets himself up in authority. But His Majesty's uniform takes precedence of cheap pride—"

David Rathesay flung forward in a burst of rage.

"Cheap pride, is it?" he burst out. "And you'd insult an old man?"

Quick as a flash he whipped a silver cup from the table and shot cup and contents into the lieutenant's face. The cup tinkled on the floor. The lieutenant calmly wiped his cheeks.

"So now we come to honest work!" said he. "Mr. Rathesay, your servant; I'm quite at your disposal. No doubt Captain Dudley will second you."

Silence settled on all four men, staring the one at the other. But old Louey stooped and picked up the silver cup, and held it to his eyes.

"A pretty thing!" said he. "And words graved on it—ah, fine words! '*Droit et Dieu.*' Now, what would those words mean, Your Lordship?"

The Laird took the cup from him and hurled it into a far corner.

"The motto of the Frenchman who was once here," said he. "Where were those guns hidden?"

Louey touched the arm of Derek Edwards.

"This young man and I, we might show you where, My Lord," he said. "That is, if he were free to help me."

The Laird looked him in the eyes for a moment, then smiled frostily, took out a snuffbox, and helped himself daintily.

"Very well; you're a clever fellow," he said, and turned. "Gentlemen, for the present we must, all of us, forget what has happened here."

An astonishing thing to say; he said it and drove it home. His mastery, his bitter hard personality, overbore them. He forestalled the lieutenant, who was about to speak.

"My Lord Percy, you have been insulted. I apologize, as my son will also do; such an affront should not have been offered a guest. Your opinions are your own to entertain. Captain Dudley, it was folly in me to assign this fisherman to you; he shall be set at liberty. Before us is a matter of consequence. We cannot jeopardize it and ourselves by quarrels. French cannon are hidden here; the powder is no doubt spoiled, but we

need those cannon. Well? Do you agree with me?"

"Spoken like a gentleman!" Lord James put out his hand. "Will you forgive my unkindly words, Rathesay? Thanks." He turned. "Captain Dudley, our host is right. This is no place to indulge our petty feelings."

"Very well; but I'll not forget your sentiments," replied the Captain sullenly.

"I trust not," rejoined the lieutenant with bland venom.

"So now," the Laird exclaimed quickly. "I think we stand chastened all around, and we have here two trespassers who turn out to be fishermen in distress." He gestured to a servant. "Pour wine to warm these visitors. Sit down, my friends, sit down!" He gave Edwards and Louey a wintry smile. "You are free to seek shelter on my shores, and to leave when you like. In return, we shall discuss those hidden cannon."

Edwards caught a sly wink from old Louey, and amid the general resumption of seats, took one of the vacant chairs. The servant brought them each a silver cup of wine, and refilled those on the table, replacing the one that was gone.

SILENCE, that was it; tasting the wine, Edwards held his peace. He was on the alert, but his place was to keep silence now. The swift outburst of passions had smoothed down—and the smoothing was as amazing as the outbursts had been. He sensed something behind it all, something as yet vague and sinister and deadly, but unseen. And oddly enough, to him it seemed that the person who held the key to it was old Louey.

Poor Bose, left with his two men, looked from his lost prisoners to his Captain, then at the Laird, with so comical an air of utter bewilderment that Dudley, despite his choler, broke into a laugh.

"Very good, Bose; go along, lads, get back to the ship. Tell the mate that if the yards are up before dark, there'll be a tot of grog for all hands."

The three men departed. Louey was savoring his wine, but now he looked up and met the gaze of the Laird, and spoke in his assumed New England twang.

"I doubt if the powder be spoiled, My Lord. It's in high ground, and was wrapped in sailcloth well tarred."

"And can you go to the spot?"

"I think so, Your Worship."

A sweeping current—this was the feeling Edwards had, as he met the eyes and faces around. He himself was caught up in this queer movement of forces that was moving, moving somewhere; he was being borne along with it, whither he knew not. . . . It was one of those queer in-

stants of half-comprehension that come upon the brain and are gone again, leaving no ripple; he looked almost guiltily at the men about him, drawing at their pipes, intent upon their own affairs. The Laird was speaking to Captain Dudley, who nodded.

"I think so. Once sure of the spot, we can put half a dozen of the men to work with tools, if you have picks and shovels. Best get at it."

The Laird rose. "All right, old man. Take us to the spot. Will you come, My Lord?"

Lord James Percy nodded, and there was general movement; cloaks were brought; wine was gulped; and they all trooped out of the creaking old house into the gusty outdoors. Louey stepped unbidden into the lead, and Edwards joined him, the others straggling behind. As they crossed the garden, Edwards had a glimpse of faces at upper windows—a woman and, he thought, two children. For the first time he realized that a family lived here.

Louey led toward the towering trees on the hill just back of the house that gave some shelter from winter blasts. He hesitated, stopped, and scrutinized the massive growths. Then, with decision, he went in among the trees and began to examine them closely. After a moment he seized a drooping limb, held it aside, and pointed silently to the trunk. An old mark became visible, deeply blazed by an ax.

"Here is the place," he said, and stamped on the hard earth. "There were six guns."

Two servants came from the house; other men came from the ship; tools were brought and the work began. David Rathesay lent a hand; Edwards took a shovel. Old Louey, wrapped in a cloak that had been given him, stood looking on; in that unshaven white-bearded countenance Edwards fancied a strange unwonted expression of malignity, of vivid hatred. He remembered suddenly that Louey was a Frenchman out of Canada; yes, he would hate the British, of course!

Spelled by one of the seamen, he lit his pipe and went over beside Louey.

"Is anything there, Louey," he asked guardedly, "or were you just talking?"

Louey smiled. "You'll see! I did not think Englishmen would dig them up, however. This gale may spoil all I had planned. We must not talk together; they'll suspect. That damned Laird watches like a hawk! Tonight, Derek, tonight!"

Edwards turned away, more puzzled than ever. What would they suspect? Louey's story about guns and powder must be true—a lie would



Louey, a figure of romance, in his handsome if rumpled coat.

have been utter folly. Too bad to put such stuff in English hands, when others had more bitter need! Still, reflected Derek, it had bought their freedom; but thought of such a bargain rankled.

Lord James Percy came to him as he stood apart, resting, and spoke a quiet word.

"Young man, I like your spirit. You've seen more than one type of Englishman today; remember the best, not the worst. Are you one of the rebels?"

"I hope to be," said Edwards bluntly.

The other smiled. "Who is this old man, your companion?"

"Ask him, not me."

THE wind had carried the words to Louey, who turned and approached them.

"Aye, My Lord," he said, "you may well ask. You shall have your answer tomorrow morning, I trust."

He swung off, at a stir of excitement among the workers, who had laid bare huge logs deep in the sandy soil. Lord James looked after him with a puzzled frown, but made no comment.

The cache began to get uncovered, but it was a slow and laborious business; it had been laid away for keeps. Afternoon dragged on; rotted tarpau-

lins gave birth to kegs. One of them was knocked in, and powder was discovered. It was untouched by damp, and apparently excellent in quality. Under them were cannon. One was brought out, and proved to be a long nine-pounder, stamped with the French fleur-de-lis. Three in all were out of the cache when early darkness began to gather. Shears were rigged, and the other three guns came out before night ended the work.

Old Rathesay, his cloak whipping around him in the gale, came to Louey and Edwards, one of the servants at his elbow.

"You'll accept my hospitality for the night," he said, "since the gale still holds and it would be impossible for you to get away in your boat. I'll see that you're well rewarded in the morning, old man."

"Thank you, My Lord," said Louey. "I shall, I trust, be rewarded."

The servant led them to the house and showed them into a small chamber at the rear. He spoke with a strong Scots accent, as he lighted a tallow dip.

"Dinner later in the kitchen," said he, with a sniff. "Make your two selves at home, but not too much at home, if you value your skins."

Left alone, Derek Edwards sank down on one of the bunks, filled his pipe, lit it at the candle, and watched the old man getting out of his heavy peajacket.

"Well, Louey, I have to thank you for pulling me out of a bad fix; they'd have pressed me sure. But you've got a lot of things to explain— What's the matter?"

Louey had sunk down, face in hands; after a moment he looked up.

"It is hard not to hate that man, Derek! Yes, a great deal you don't



Louey stooped; the lid came up protestingly. "Long years back," he said, "these were treasures more rare than gold."

understand; and I fear we've failed. I wanted to get that cache of guns and powder into the hands of General Washington's Navy. I never dreamed another ship would be lying here."

He paused, then resumed, with a more collected air:

"*An Appeal to Heaven!*" he murmured. "That's the motto on the Pine-tree Flag. We need it now. Heaven helps those who help themselves. . . . Derek, I've done a terrible thing, a bitter sad thing! You remember that New Bedford fisher captain?"

"Of course."

Louey shook his head sadly. "He knew where to find one of the rebel

schooners that was cruising off the coast. He promised to get word to her at once. We made a rendezvous; I was to meet her here this very afternoon, if she sailed into the harbor. And now—do you see? The gale—she has not been able to get here; she will come tomorrow, the day after, heaven knows when! And those English guns will sink her!"

A tragic gesture, and he fell silent.

Edwards remembered that long private talk aboard the New Bedford craft. So old Louey had really helped the French hide these guns and powder—had tried now to get them into rebel hands!

"Good for you, Louey!" he said. "Don't worry about the Pine-tree

schooner. I'll bet if she does come, she'll blow this snow out of the water—or capture her in a hurry."

Louey shook his head with doleful mien. "No. The New Bedford man said she was armed with a few swivel guns and some four-pounders, nothing larger. And in the morning these British are going to mount the guns from the cache, to command the harbor. Do you see? The schooner will come. It is like a trap, a trap! The rebel schooner is lost. And all my own fault—my fault!"

His voice dwindled. He muttered to himself in French and sat staring at nothing, old nervous fingers plucking at his white goatee. And now Edwards was indeed startled and aghast, for Louey spoke the truth. That schooner was lost, if she showed up.

The door was flung open. The servant addressed them, sneeringly.

"Come along, colonial gentlemen! And we'll thank you to do your smoking out of doors, if smoke ye must, lest it set the place afire."

They followed silently into a corner of the big kitchen, where a table was set for them. Two women were at work cooking; another servant brought them heaped plates of meat

and bread and potatoes, with mugs of wine. At intervals, as doors were opened, came hearty bursts of voices from those at table in the main room.

"I begin to see the meaning of your veiled allusions to tomorrow morning," said Derek, as they ate and drank. "Still, Louey, the schooner may not come."

"She will come—too late. The storm will blow itself out tonight."

Derek started. His brown features firmed; a spark sprang in his eyes as a sudden thought leaped in him.

"Ah—wait, Louey, wait! Where did they put those powder-kegs?"

"Left them by the cache, covered over."

"Then—not now. Later! Best not talk here," he said, eagerly but cautiously. "Cheer up! The problem's solved—maybe."

He laughed, brightened, and came to life. He felt, and was, another person, now that the mystery was dissolved and the situation in the clear; his hands were no longer tied. He chafed the cooks and servants, jested with Louey, and soon had the stricken old man smiling once more.

Their meal finished, they filled their pipes, took an ember from the fire, and went outside for a smoke before turning in.

With darkness, the gale had subsided and a few stars were visible. A chorus of singing voices lifted from the snow in the harbor below; before the house, two seamen with muskets paced as guards. Assured that it was safe to talk, Edwards spoke his mind.

"Here it is, Louey! We're not prisoners; we can get out of here well before daylight. If we can get hold of a maul and some spikes or rat-tail file, I'll guarantee to spike those old French cannon of yours so they can't be used for a long time. What's more, we can set a spark to that open keg of powder, touch off the whole batch, and run for it. Once we reach our own boat, devil take the Britishers! They have boats here, but they'd never catch us. What say?"

LOUEY burst into a laugh and clapped him on the arm.

"Good man, good man! Oh, joyous fellow! Why didn't I think of it? Splendid!"

"Only, where to find maul and spikes? They're not easily come by."

Louey's chuckles redoubled. "Wait! Perhaps I can find them—and other things to boot. Ah, Derek, I love you for this! Come along now—turn in early; I'm mortal weary, and there's a long way to go ere daylight. Ah, these Britishers! A pleasure to cheat them; and I should hate that bitter man, but I'll not let myself—"

His speech was cut off abruptly as a burst of sound came from the lighted windows of the main room,

above them. It was a quick, sharp explosion of voices, alive with furious passion; after a moment it died out.

"What's up, I wonder?" murmured Derek.

"Hard drinking and hot anger," said Louey. "The sparks set ablaze this morning were not so easily quenched, perhaps. Who knows? The long silence of the years may have its reward at last, and hatred held in check be served by other agents."

He knocked out his pipe, and Edwards followed back to their little room, to fall asleep as soon as bedded.

DAWN was still an hour under the horizon when Edwards awakened to Louey's touch. He sat up, yawned, rose and went to the door. It was not barred.

"I thought they might shut us in."

"No," said Louey in the darkness. "Heavy doors, closed and barricaded at night, close off this portion from the main house. Never mind; we'll have no trouble, I hope."

"Won't find any spikes lying around in the kitchen."

"Take my hand. Follow me: no noise!"

They stepped out in the darkness. To Edwards, it was blind madness, for instead of seeking the open air, Louey headed into the kitchen; although the fire was long since extinct on the big cooking-hearth, the warmth of the stones was distinctly felt. They were going away from the outside door, past the hearth.

They went on. Louey halted; he seemed to be fumbling at the wall. Something moved creakily. There was a rush of air, foul in the nostrils.

"Look out for steps," muttered Louey. "Get your fire-bag out."

Two steps, and about them chill air, still smelly, as though in a place long closed up. Underfoot was hard dirt. Louey drew a deep breath as though in relief.

"All right. You strike a light while I shut the door."

Edwards grunted, squatted, got out his fire-bag and fell to work with the steel. Sparks flew into his birch tinder. Louey rejoined him, crouching, holding a candle. It caught; a flame flickered up. Edwards rose, staring around in astonishment.

Here was a little room with low ceiling of logs and beams; a room beneath the house, a chamber of rotted litter and old mold, old weapons thick with rust, old peltries that were mere outlines of hair and rotted skin. Louey chuckled.

"They never found it, all these years! Hold the candle, Derek."

Edwards obeyed. The old man stooped; dust and ashes were brushed away; a chest stood revealed in the light. The lid came up, protesting-

ly. Louey clawed furs and canvas aside.

"Long years back," he said, holding up tools, "these were treasures more rare than gold or silver! Here are forged spikes; here's a hammer. D'ye know how to spike a gun?"

"I've seen it done." Edwards took the big four-sided nails and the heavy hammer. "These will serve."

Sudden excited laughter seized Louey as he dragged other things from the chest. Into the hands of Edwards he pressed coins, yellow heavy coins.

"Gold! It'll buy you a uniform to fight the British in," he cackled. "All right—douse the light now, and let's to the outside. No more time to lose!"

Edwards pinched out the flame, too amazed to ask questions. The hidden secret door squeaked again; they were up the two steps and in the kitchen once more, and the door closed.

Two minutes later they were outside, in the early morning starlight.

Edwards could barely distinguish the figure of his guide, and he followed closely, across the dead garden and toward the hill-crest behind, giving the servants' quarters a wide berth. Once at the edge of the dark trees, Louey halted.

"All safe now," he said. "My faith, I never thought to see that place again!"

"How did you know of it?" demanded Edwards.

Louey ignored the question. "They'll not come until after sunrise and breakfast to mount the guns. No hurry."

ON once more, and so at last to the excavation and the pile of powder-kegs and the row of long cannon-shapes, felt rather than seen under the pale stars. Edwards crouched beside one of the cannon and felt for the touch-hole.

"The spikes will serve," he said. "At least, they'll not be drawn without tools and hard work! We'll have to wait for daylight to see the powder by—a chancy business; but we can lay a long trail of spilled powder, fire it at the end and duck for shelter. Well, here's for the job."

He went to work; a fold of his jacket over the nail-head muffled the blows. Luckily the spikes fitted well enough.

Four of the six guns were attended to in short order. The other two made trouble, since they had to be turned to get at the touch-holes. To pry the heavy metal over took their combined strength. When at last the final spike was driven home, daylight was creeping down the sky, and close objects were discernible.

"Well, so much for that," said Edwards, yawning. "Now for the pow-

der. The open keg will no doubt set the others off, but we'd better pile them over it. . . . Well, strike me for a Dutchman! Louey, you look like a king!"

He stared open-mouthed as the figure of old Louey grew upon his consciousness, and well he might; the slouched, slatternly, age-withered shape was gone. A grand cocked hat with a sweeping—albeit a battered—plume adorned Louey's head; he wore a brave full-skirted coat that came to his knees—a coat of blue and scarlet edged with heavy lace, and like the hat adorned with gold lace now blackened and tarnished. From shoulder to hip crossed a handsome baldric from which hung a sword.

"Plunder, eh?" exclaimed Edwards admiringly. "Louey, you look like another man!"

This was true; the handsome if rumpled coat hid the shrunken body; and with his white goatee and twinkling eyes, Louey was almost a figure of romance.

"Out of style, no doubt, but not a bad fit," he said. "Well, we must get at the powder—"

He checked himself and turned in startled alarm as a little burst of voices reached them; heavy tones lifted and fell.

"That's Cap'n Dudley's voice!" breathed Edwards. "They can't be coming yet to mount the guns. . . . Ah, the devil! Take cover, quick! Back behind a tree!"

BEHIND the house, crossing the garden, showed a dim group of figures. Louey darted out of sight with a muttered oath. Edwards quickly slipped behind one of the big pines above, lay flat, and looked down upon the scene cautiously; he was astonished and perplexed by the appearance of anyone at this hour. Had their evasion been discovered?

No; here were only three men approaching, and he recognized them with fresh amazement. One was the Laird, stiffly erect, a burden under his arm; with him walked Captain Dudley and the lieutenant, Lord James. Straight to the excavation they marched, and came to a halt not twenty feet from the giant trees.

Derek's first thought was one of dismay; impossible to set off the powder now! Then he listened attentively, as the Laird spoke out.

"Gentlemen, once more I beg of you to lay aside this quarrel in a mistaken sense of affronted honor—"

"No, damme!" blurted out Captain Dudley. "What was said last night surpassed human endurance! I've stood too much already from this spark of nobility, egad! On with it!"

Lord James smiled. "That settles the matter, Rathesay."

The Laird opened a case of dueling pistols. "Very well," said he. "However, let me point out that the proceedings are most improper without seconds."

"You're a witness, and that's enough," said Lord James. "Undoubtedly it would be more proper to have seconds, but I hardly think—egad! As I live and breathe!"

All three men swung around, staring, as from the trees advanced the fantastic figure of old Louey. Edwards gasped, swore under his breath, then fell into tense silence. Astonished recognition leaped out in Captain Dudley's voice.

"Damme, if it isn't the old scarecrow fisherman! You rascal, where'd you get those clothes?"

Louey halted, swept off his plumed hat, and bowed. In his bow and in his words lay something that startled them all.

"Gentlemen, your servant! If you need a second, Milord Percy, it will give me the greatest pleasure to offer you my services. If I mistake not, I once served your father in the same capacity, some forty-odd years ago."

"Why, sink me if the fellow doesn't speak like a gentleman!" gasped the Laird.

Louey turned to him with another bow. "The ghost of a gentleman, monsieur—the dead hand of the past reaching into the present! A ghost whose son you killed, and whom you thought long dead—the Sieur Louis des Forges, *seigneur* of this island. At your service, gentlemen."

Silence of stupefaction, broken by a short laugh from Edwards, but none of them heard it. So this explained everything! Old Louey, a wandering vagrant out of nowhere—yes, this was the answer! The *seigneur* of this place in days long past. . . .

"Monsieur, you honor me," said Lord James politely. "Sunrise is approaching. Will you have the goodness to give the word? Rathesay, I think we're ready."

Furious, swept by ghastly emotion, Rathesay bowed jerkily and extended the case of pistols to the principals. Dudley took one, Lord James the other. For a moment the Laird, livid as death, conferred with Louey; then the latter stepped aside.

"Back to back, gentlemen," he said. "Ten paces, as I count them, and at the word 'Ten,' turn and fire. . . . Ready? *One—two—*"

The sun was not far now. Below, the harbor and the little snow lay in clear sight. A scrap of white was turning the headland, but Edwards was only vaguely aware of it, his gaze fastened upon the scene close by.

Another story in this interesting series will appear in an early issue.

"—*nine—ten!*"

The two figures swung around; the two pistols jetted white smoke. The smoke blew off; the two men stood motionless. Then, slowly, Lord James Percy crumpled; his knees buckled; he fell forward on his face and lay quiet. Rathesay ran hastily to him, half lifted him, let him down again.

"Louey!"

Derek Edwards leaped up, a wild shout ringing on his lips.

"Louey! Look! The schooner!"

The scrap of white was around the headland, standing into the cove, a spot of color at her mizzen. Shouts lifted from the snow; a bosun's rattle bussed; white smoke spurted; a gun roared. The canvas fluttered on the schooner. She ran down straight upon the snow. A cloud of smoke rose from both decks as musketry spattered forth; under cover of it the two vessels came together; when it lifted, a mass of men was pouring over the schooner's rail to the deck of the snow.

"The flag, Louey, the flag!" yelled Edwards frantically. "Look—the Pine-tree flag!"

Captain Dudley was gone on the run. But above the fallen shape of Percy, Louey and the old Laird stood erect, looking into each other's eyes for a long moment, unheeding anything else. Louey spoke quietly, put hand to sword-hilt, dropped it again. The Laird stepped back a pace, then turned and went striding toward the house, unhurried, erect, white hair flying in the breeze.

THE sun came up in a burst of flooding golden light. The smoke blew clear of the two vessels; the red ensign of the snow fluttered down. Boats were putting out for shore, crowded with men. Edwards ran to Louey and caught his arm.

"What did you say to him? Is the lieutenant dead?"

Louey nodded calmly. "What did I say? That he need fear nothing from me; that the Sieur des Forges is above hatreds and blood-feuds; he has found a better cause. Come along, Derek—meet the Pine-tree flag and serve it in honor! It's a good thing we did not destroy that powder, eh?"

They started down the slope together, toward the Americans who were flooding up from the landing. Derek Edwards looked back to where Lord James Percy lay in the morning sunlight, and shook his head.

"I'm sorry about him. Too bad. He was a good man, Britisher or not! Too good to end like this, Louey."

"Not good men—but good deeds will change the world," said Louey. "And those whom the gods love, die young—as you'll learn when you're as old as I am."

SIX miles across stretch the sands from Cape Blouharnes to the Bec de Pieuvre; and ten miles out they stretch at the lowest spring tide from river-mouth to beyond the Rock of the Black Virgin.

Sands glittering yellow under blaze of sunlight; sands golden-orange under slant of sunset; sands glistening gray under a sky of scurrying, ragged storm clouds; sands that attune themselves to every mood of the heavens.

At full-moon tide the whole sands are clothed with the mantle of the ocean, and fishing-boats saunter slowly above them dragging in their wake invisible seine-nets. Then the sea will withdraw for mile after mile, unveiling the seductive charms of the sands—smooth, glistening, sensuous. At full ebb of the spring tides a man may walk dry-shod the whole ten miles from the shore to the Rock of the Black Virgin, if he choose the right hours and path, and avoid the trickling sand-streams and the treacheries of the known quicksands. Here and there over the wide stretch of the sands are lines of thin poles which act as landmarks to the fishermen and those who drag for eels and crayfish.

Without such guides, even the shrewdest sandsman might fall victim to the smiling siren whose bridal bed is quicksand and whose kisses stifle...

In pursuit of his life-work, the study of the human mind, Dr. Wycherley had decided one summer on a tramp through Brittany. It is a land of strange superstitions—superstitions that reach back through the centuries beyond the Christian era and link today with the age of the Druids and even with the cradle-time of the Aryan races. There live in one corner of Brittany a people who are, as it were, an outpost of some Mongol race, driftwood left behind by some mighty wave of invasion over Europe. In their high, prominent cheek-bones and close-set eyes, one can read the wash of the Tartar blood. In their customs and in the strange superstitions they have grafted on to their Christian faith, one can divine the remnants of a religion five thousand years old.

To get close to the people he wished to study, Dr. Wycherley avoided the towns and the hotels, and sought his lodging in wayside farmhouses and fishermen's cottages. It was thus that he came to stay with old Gil Maurtain and his wife, and Yvette his grandniece, in their cottage by the sands of Blouharnes.

The doctor, with his keen intuitive sense, realized from the first evening of his stay that under the placid, somnolent exterior of the cottage life



The Strange Cases of Dr. Wycherley

By MAX RITTENBERG

A TREMENDOUS narrative of elemental passions is unfolded in this unusual tale. Greed and hate and cunning are sharply arrayed against love and courage and devotion; so, based on this world-old conflict, we have a story of the utmost significance and power.

THE SMILE OF THE BLACK VIRGIN

there smouldered a drama ready to burst into flame at an instant's notice. He sensed it as vividly as a man can sense a coming thunderstorm. On the psychic plane, the air was electric. And so he resolved to remain on at the cottage. His help might be needed.

Old Maurtain was more than agreeable to the extension of the doctor's stay. It meant money, and money was the ruling passion of the old sandsman. While other passions had burnt themselves out, this one had intensified with age. The less he could use money, the more he coveted it.

They were sitting one evening on the wooden seat outside the cottage door, waiting the call to supper, when the old man suddenly raised a gnarled finger and pointed east across the bay.

"See you, it has returned," he exclaimed.

Dr. Wycherley's sight was not so keen as the sandsman's, and it was a little time before he could locate the object pointed at—a dark speck flying low across the sands against the background of the cliff named the Bec de Pieuvre.

"An *aéroplane*."

"A child of the devil," answered Maurtain, with an ugly frown crisscrossing the age-lines on his forehead.

"You say it has returned?"

"It was here in May, two months ago."

"No doubt these sands make an excellent ground for trial flights."

"It will bring ill luck upon all of us. I must burn a big candle to the Black Virgin."

"You mean at the shrine on the rock yonder?"

"Yes, the shrine to *Nôtre Dame des Mers*. We of the sands call her the Black Virgin."

"Who owns this machine?"

"He is not one of us, but a stranger. He has built himself a shed

across the bay. He calls himself André Vic."

"I know the name." It was that of a young professional aviator who had taken part in the Paris-Rome flight—a mechanic rapidly making fame for himself in the *aéroplane* world.

"It should not be allowed," said the old man sullenly. "The sands are ours. It will spoil the fishing."

"How?"

"The noise of this devil-bird frightens away the fish. They will leave us and find a new home. But beside that, it is unlucky."

Yvette came out of the cottage to tell them supper was ready. She was scarcely eighteen, lithe and slender, contrasting sharply with the other girls of Blouharnes, a type somewhat short and stocky. Her finely-spun fair hair was gathered demurely under her snowy coif like that of a Quakeress. An artist would have claimed her for a model.

As she came out by the open door, her keen eyes sighted the monoplane, now resting motionless on the sands across the bay. She said nothing.

Dr. Wycherley, noting that she saw and yet made no comment, sensed some connection with the electric restlessness underlying the placid interior of the cottage life.

"It is an *aéroplane*," he ventured.

"Yes, Monsieur," answered Yvette, without raising her eyes to his.

They went in to their homely supper, and the old man asked the blessing of God and of the Black Virgin upon the meal. Dr. Wycherley, who respected all religions, bowed his head reverently.

Late that night, when the household should have been fast asleep, Dr. Wycherley awakened to a slight noise in the room adjoining his. Impelled by a sudden instinct, he threw aside the bedclothes and went to the window.

Twice-told Tales from BLUE BOOK (April 1913) We appreciate requests from readers who recall a specially pleasing story deserving of reprint here.

Yvette, with a dark cloak thrown round her shoulders, was lowering herself out of the window of her room. She dropped lightly to the ground, and began to walk rapidly eastward along the grass of the foreshore. Presently she turned down to the sands and started to cross them in a line for the Bec de Pieuvre. Dr. Wycherley watched her until she was lost to view.

Now he understood one element in the drama of the cottage.

YVETTE was early about the house the next morning, at work on her household duties. Although she must have walked twelve miles between midnight and dawn, to her lover across the sands and back, Dr. Wycherley saw in her no signs of fatigue. She was singing softly and happily when he came down to breakfast.

The tide now covered three-quarters of the bay. The waters were a-ripple with a gentle breeze from eastward.

"I should like to visit the Rock of the Black Virgin," said the doctor to the old sandsman. "Can I hire a boat and some one to accompany me?"

"Certainly, Monsieur, that is easily arranged. Yvette will take you out to the Rock. There is a good sailing breeze, and she handles a boat well."

The girl accompanied Dr. Wycherley to the mouth of the tidal stream, a mile or so away, where their boat was moored to a primitive form of wharf. It was a small, stout dinghy with a lug-sail. In it the two made out by the winding channel of the stream and so on to the open waters. In a couple of hours they had reached the Rock, and were climbing to the shrine.

Dr. Wycherley, not usually interested in religious emblems except in so far as they bore on his own line of study, showed a strong interest in the sculptured figure that stood in a niche near the summit of the rock. It was cut from some very hard stone, dead-black in color—a stone quite unlike the gray granite of the Rock itself and certainly not to be matched in the whole of Brittany. Dr. Wycherley knew it for the same stone as the mysterious *lapis nigra* of the Forum at Rome, about the origin of which archaeologists argue heatedly.

Even more than the stone itself did the figure interest the psychologist. The pose was set and formal, the face hard and sphinx-like.

"Do you believe this is a statue of the Virgin Mary?" he asked of Yvette.

"Of course, Monsieur."

"What does the *curé* of your parish think?"

"He has wanted several times to have it taken away, but we of the sands would not let him."

"The face is very cold and hard."

"Now it is so; but sometimes she smiles."

"Smiles?"

"Yes, Monsieur—when Our Lady wishes to bring good fortune to anyone." The girl began rapidly to relate stories of good luck amongst the fisherfolk—a record catch, some wreckage washed up on the sands, once the actual wreck of a cargo steamer on the Bec de Pieuvre. All these she attributed to the influence of the Black Virgin. The sincerity of her belief was beyond question.

"I will light my uncle's candle," continued Yvette, "and perhaps Our Lady will be gracious and smile on us."

Old Maurtain had given her a candle to burn before the shrine. He had been careful to scratch his name on it, so that the Black Virgin might know that the offering was his. Yvette now set the candle in a metal casket to one side of and below the figure, and lit it, watching the face of the statue intently.

Against the sunlight the candle struggled feebly, but presently a cloud passed over the sun, and in the semi-darkness of the niche where the statue was placed the candlelight was flung sharply on the face of the Black Virgin, altering completely the normal fall of the shadows.

"See, Monsieur!" exclaimed the girl joyfully.

Dr. Wycherley nodded his head in silence. The up-flung candlelight had brought a new expression to the cold features of the statue—almost a sardonic smile. The imagination of the fisherfolk would easily construe this to a smile of gracious benediction. There lay the power of the statue—in the auto-suggestion it roused in the minds of the devotees. Feeling themselves to be lucky, it naturally followed that they would put out their best exertions—and so "luck" would come to them. Dr. Wycherley could easily understand that the *curé* of the parish—and for that matter, even the bishop of the diocese—would be powerless against the smile of the Black Virgin, this pagan statue from the mists of antiquity.

The cloud passed away from the sun, and the features changed back again to the set, sphinx-like expression of before.

As they started to descend the Rock, a faint whirring noise caused them both to look up to the sky. The aeroplane was soaring far above them at a height of several thousand feet. Suddenly the whirring ceased; the motor had been shut off. The aircraft dipped sharply downward, and began to descend in a series of spirals. It came down until, like a seagull, its feet almost touched the water, and then with a rasp the motor came into

action and the aviator sped off and upward, waving his hand to the girl on the Rock.

Yvette waved her handkerchief back to him.

"Have you ever been up in the air?" asked the doctor.

"Once, Monsieur," answered Yvette, with a deep blush in her cheeks. "But my uncle did not like it."

"He is prejudiced against the aeroplane?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"And he has other views for your future, has he not?"

The girl looked startled. "How did Monsieur know that? Did my uncle tell you?"

"No; but I can sometimes read thoughts."

A sudden flaming passion came into Yvette's eyes. "*I hate him!*" she cried.

"Your uncle?"

"No, Etienne!"

Dr. Wycherley waited for her to say more, but seemingly she had repented of her confidence, for she changed the subject at once and spoke only of impersonal matters.

When they returned to the cottage, it was to find a visitor to table—a powerful, hard-bit, dark-haired man of thirty-five or so, with prominent cheekbones and eyes set close together.

Old Maurtain introduced him as "My friend, Monsieur Etienne Carnot." A *patron*, he added, meaning he was an owner of fishing-boats.

THE storm was near at hand. Dr. Wycherley felt the psychic tension as they sat at table. The *patron's* eyes were constantly on Yvette, but the girl avoided his gaze and answered questions briefly and in a low voice.

After the meal, the household was very evidently waiting for the doctor to withdraw and leave them to themselves, so he took books with him and went out walking around the bay.

Certainly he had no right to interfere in the family affairs of the Maurtains. Yvette must fight her own battle against her people. And yet, if there were any way in which he could help her—

He felt a sudden desire to see the young aviator face to face and judge what kind of man he was. Accordingly he made for the hamlet near the mouth of the stream, and engaged a tumble-down carriage at the inn to drive him to the far side of the bay.

At the end of a tedious, jolting drive, Dr. Wycherley found himself at the field where the young aviator had built his hangar—a long, low shed of galvanized iron. Apparently he lived with his mount, for there was no other building near, and a thin curl of smoke from a chimney on the tin roof suggested a cooking-range somewhere inside.

Dr. Wycherley traversed the field on foot. Through the open door of the hangar, he saw two young men intently at work on the wing of the machine, fitting some new stays.

He watched in silence until one of the men looked up abruptly and jerked out:

"Who are you? We don't want any idlers around here!"

The young fellow was clean-shaven, clean-cut in features, brisk and authoritative, and the impression he gave to the psychologist was that of a healthy mechanic-athlete very much wrapped up in his work—one of the modern, wholesome young Frenchmen so utterly different from the comic types of the English stage.

It was not a pleasant welcome, but Dr. Wycherley did not resent the words or the tone of voice. This young fellow was on his own ground and quite within his rights to order away time-wasting strangers. The doctor replied:

"I am a scientist, and I am staying with Gil Maurtain and his wife—and Yvette."

Something in the tone of Dr. Wycherley's quiet words seemed to appeal to the young man, for he answered rapidly:

"Good. Any friends of theirs are welcome here. My brother!" jerking his hand toward the other man, younger than himself and less decided in feature and manner. "Want to see my new flier?"

"I should be very much interested."

"It's my own design." He proceeded to expound the points of the machine with enthusiasm.

"I saw you make a splendid flight this morning. You passed very close to me when I was on the Rock of the Black Virgin—with Yvette."

André gave a rapid side-glance at the doctor, and then called to his brother:

"Knock off work and make us some coffee."

The brother went off obediently.

"*Dites donc*, what's the point of your coming here?" asked the aviator shrewdly of Dr. Wycherley.

"I come as a friend of Yvette's."

"Oh!" There was suspicion in his exclamation.

"The question I am going to ask is one I have no right to ask, and so you need not answer it unless you choose to. Do you want to marry Yvette?"

"My God, yes!" came the instant response.

"I judged that. Well, you will have to play a strong hand."

"Why?"

"There is a determined rival in the field."

"I know." The young fellow flicked his thumb and finger together in contempt. "Is that all?"

"That is all—at present."

"What makes you say that?"

"I feel that—more strongly than words can put it. Something big is going to happen—suddenly—like the bursting of a dam. And I am afraid for little Yvette."

Young Vic sobered at this. "Will you be staying on at the cottage until next week?" he asked.

"Probably."

"Then will you send for me at once if I should be wanted? I've got to get this flier ready for the Western Circuit Race. When I've won that, I shall take a bag full of gold to old Maurtain, and empty it all over his table; then Yvette and I will marry."

"If you were wanted very quickly, it would be difficult to let you know in time. There is no telegraph or telephone from Cape Blouharnes to here."

The young fellow thought this over for some time.

"Here's a plan. I'll get some rockets from the lighthouse, and send them to you at the cottage. If I'm wanted in a hurry, you could fire them off."

"Suppose you were asleep at the time?"

"My brother and I take turns in watching throughout the night; otherwise these pigs of ignorant Bretons would be wrecking my machine. Myself, I'm from Burgundy. Besides that, I'll ask the lighthouse men—they're friends of mine—to keep an eye open and let me know if you send up a rocket."

With the unconscious selfishness of youth, he had been taking the doctor's interest in his affairs as a mere matter of course. Now, however, he seemed to realize suddenly that behind Dr. Wycherley's modest and unassuming exterior was a man of international reputation. Deference came into his voice as he continued:

"Monsieur, you are very kind to put yourself to so much trouble for the sake of Yvette and myself. I owe you a thousand thanks. What can I do for you in return? Would you like a flight with me into the clouds one day?"

Dr. Wycherley smiled. "I am an old man," he replied, "and I have long ago come down from the clouds. Earth has more than enough to teach me."

That night old Maurtain was in a state of secretive excitement. Dr. Wycherley, observing him closely, knew that something vital had happened during his absence from the cottage that afternoon—something connected with the sinister figure of Etienne Concarnot.

Long after his usual bedtime, the sandsman sat on the wooden seat outside his cottage, smoking and gazing intently over the sands shrouded in the veil of the night. Dr. Wycherley,

from the window of his room above, watched also, but for what he knew not.

About midnight there came a startled exclamation from old Maurtain sitting below on the wooden seat. Far out on the sands, at a distance which the darkness made impossible to judge with accuracy, a vivid grass-green light flared up—then died away.

A footstep sounded near at hand. The voice of Etienne Concarnot whispered in triumph:

"Thou seest?"

"I see well," replied Maurtain eagerly.

"Thou thinkest it is indeed she?"

"Who else? I tell thee that not only did She smile but also She raised Her hand and pointed—out yonder."

"It is wonderful!"

"My grandfather told me of this. It has been a secret in our family. Thou also must keep it secret."

"Indeed, yes."

"Now wait until to-morrow night. At the same hour. She will again walk the sands."

"Blessed be Her name!"

"Remember, in what comes of this we share equally!"

"That is well understood."

The two men went into the cottage, and their whispers were lost to Dr. Wycherley.

The psychologist took pencil and paper, and with his left hand began to draw from memory a miniature of the Black Virgin, accurate to the smallest detail. He enclosed it in an envelope addressed to Professor Marnier of Paris, an archeologist of European reputation and a friend of the doctor's. With the drawing went a brief note:

Who or what is this? Let me know immediately by telegram.

WYCHERLEY

NEXT day there came a call for Dr. Wycherley which it was impossible for him to solve. He was wanted at Nantes in consultation over a mental case in the family of the Minister of Justice. The call had been some days in reaching his present address, and accordingly he hastened to Nantes by the first train.

It was very late that evening when a tedious, cross-country train landed him back at the nearest station to Blouharnes. The dilapidated fly belonging to the local inn-keeper jolted him over the rough *route communale*, through a slowly drizzling rain, to the cottage by the sands. There he found a telegram awaiting him in his room:

Undoubtedly statue of Astarte or goddess with similar attributes in later times was considered goddess of love but original attribute was goddess of fortune human sacrifices were made to win her favor chiefly young maidens.

MARNIER

Goddess of fortune! Was this the key to the mysterious conversation of the night before between Maurtain and the sinister *patron* of fishing-boats?

Dr. Wycherley went down to the living-room of the cottage to forage for some supper. Although it was very late—past eleven o'clock—both the sandsman and his wife were sitting in the room, talking in low, eager whispers. At his entrance they ceased abruptly.

"A NASTY night," ventured the doctor.

"Yes, Monsieur," they agreed.

"Can I have some supper?"

The wife went to fetch it.

"I have bought a little trinket for Yvette," said the doctor presently, as he sat down to table. "Only a trifle, but it may please her. You have no objection to her taking it?"

The old dame answered with a new-born self-importance: "Ah, Monsieur, now we shall be able to buy her a gold watch and chain and—"

Her husband made a warning gesture, and she stopped short in her sentence.

"You have come into a legacy?" asked the doctor, but the question was only to keep conversation going. The realization had come to him that in some way the threatened storm had broken upon the household, and he was not listening with the organ of hearing, but—if one may strain words—listening with the psychic sense, his power of gathering the thought-vibrations of others.

"Something like that," was the cautious answer of old Maurtain.

Dr. Wycherley deliberately laid down his knife and fork, and with a sudden blaze of white-hot energy flung out this question, full into Maurtain's face:

"Where is Yvette?"

The sandsman quivered as though he had received an actual blow.

"That is not your affair!" he retorted with sullen suspicion.

"Where is Yvette?" repeated the doctor imperiously.

Involuntarily the old dame turned her head toward the window of the living-room.

"Out on the sands! On a black night like this! Do you mean to say that you have sent her out on the sands? Why?"

"That is not your—" repeated old Maurtain angrily, but Dr. Wycherley interrupted him with a fire of questions:

"Out to follow the Black Virgin? Out to the green light? Out to the quicksands?"

"No, Monsieur!" answered the wife with real indignation and at the same time with the deepest conviction in her voice. "To find the buried trea-

sure which Our Blessed Lady will lead her to! That is why Yvette has gone out on the sands! She will mark the spot with a pole, and tomorrow we shall dig up the treasure and be rich—very rich—so that we can—"

"You mean that this fellow Concanot has told you to send her?"

"Yes; he could not go himself, because it is only to a young maiden that Our Lady will reveal the treasure, so we arranged that Yvette should go with a lantern and a long pole—"

Dr. Wycherley did not wait to hear more. It was the time for swift, decisive action. Only two possibilities could now save Yvette from Concanot's fiendish revenge of death amongst the quicksands, a death to which the girl was going with implicit faith in the guidance of the Black Virgin—two possibilities: a miracle, or rescue by *aéroplane*.

In his room were Vic's rockets—three of them. He brought them down and rapidly set them up in the foreshore in front of the cottage. A sheltered match set light to the fuse, and with a roar the rocket shot skyward and burst out into a drooping pendant of red stars, blurred by the drizzle of the night. A second followed, and at a few minutes' interval, a third.

WHILE Dr. Wycherley questioned and cross-questioned the two Maurtains, now thoroughly frightened, as to the direction the girl had taken out on the sands when she had left the cottage a couple of hours before, some of the villagers arrived, panting, in hastily-donned clothes, to learn what the firing of the rockets meant.

Rapidly the doctor organized a search party to follow her footsteps across the waste of sands, uncovered at full ebb.

A low whirring noise made itself heard, growing rapidly louder.

"Shout!" ordered the doctor. "Shout all together, so that he will know where to land."

Presently the rhythmic spatter of the Gnome motor ceased abruptly; the aircraft 'planed down, and with a jerk hit the sands by the cottage and ran along to a stop.

André Vic and his brother jumped off from their seats.

"What's the matter?" shouted André through the drizzle.

Dr. Wycherley ran to meet him with a lantern, explaining in rapid, terse sentences what the call to action meant.

"We'll off to find her—my brother and I!"

"No, let your brother stay behind. I will come."

"You don't know the machine."

"But I know where Yvette has gone. I can pilot you."

It was no time for argument.

"Jump in!" answered the aviator, pointing to the rear seat of the monoplane.

The younger brother held on to the tail until the whirr of the front propeller pulled the machine out of his grasp. Like a swift-running ostrich, the monoplane shot along the sands, and then, swaying slightly from side to side, slid upwards into the air.

It was the first time Dr. Wycherley had been in an *aéroplane*. The rush of the air blinded him and deafened him and half-choked him. He had to fight for balance and breath before he could call into the speaking-tube a direction for André to steer. There were only two landmarks to make a course by—the light from the Bec de Pieuvre lighthouse, and the vague shape of the Rock blurred almost to invisibility in this black drizzling night. Dr. Wycherley gave a course which was, as best he could judge, the direction of the green light he had seen flare up the evening before. It was in that direction that old Maurtain, urged by the *patron* of fishing-boats, had sent his grandniece.

But the course was a hopelessly vague one. Flying low, they drove out to the tide-line, and back again, and around, and could discern no trace of Yvette. The lantern she carried would send its light a very feeble distance on such a night, and the girl herself would only be seen if they passed close to her. On that great waste of sands, six miles across and seven miles out at the present ebbtide, the chance of finding her was pitifully small.

"The tide's on the turn!" cried André into the speaking-tube, after half an hour or more of fruitless search. "My God, she's lost!"

To the doctor's memory flashed back the words, "At the same hour She will again walk the sands." Did it mean that Concanot would again have arranged a carbide flare, colored green, in order to lure the girl out to the quicksands? If only—

DR. WYCHERLEY looked at his watch. Close on midnight. This should be the time, if ever.

Yes, there it was! The green flare was throwing out its lure into the night.

"Make for that light!" he called into the speaking-tube.

André gave a sharp turn to his steering-wheel, and the monoplane bore swift and straight to the direction of the green flare. A few moments later, Dr. Wycherley's straining ears caught a faint cry through the racket of the motor.

"We are near her! Circle round and round."

André instantly shut off the motor, and began to plane the machine

round in wide circles. With the noise of the motor cut off, Yvette's agonized shrieks for help came clear to them. The young aviator took his distance with splendid judgment, and the monoplane glided down to within a few yards of her, the wheels settling deep into the semi-liquid sands with a jerk that pitched them forward from their seats as though the craft had driven into a ditch.

Rapidly fastening himself to a long rope, the young fellow climbed out from the monoplane and started to plunge across the half-dozen yards of sands to Yvette. She was buried up to the armpits by now, and struggling wildly.

He reached her, grasped at her; and the two together began slowly to sink in the oozing, sucking, surging sands

—held fast in the clutches of the Black Astarte.

Only the rope held them to a bare chance of life, and to pull them to safety they were dependent on the strength of an old man whose muscles were rusted with age. Dr. Wycherley gave of his utmost strength, but he was unequal to a strain which would have tried even a powerful athlete.

ANDRE saw it was hopeless. He started to unbind the rope from himself, in order to fasten it around Yvette and give her the chance of life.

"Wait!" cried the doctor. A sudden inspiration had come to him. He climbed over to the propeller and twisted the end of the rope round its shaft, as though it were the drum of a capstan.

"Hold tight to Yvette!" he warned as after a little fumbling about, he started the ignition of the motor.

The propeller whizzed around as it gathered in the slack of the rope; went slow to the sudden strain; and gradually the two bodies were heaved out of the sucking slime, reluctant to lose its prey.

Safe! On board the monoplane, held up by its two broad wings, they could wait until the rising tide should float them off the quicksands. . . .

Early the next morning, while Yvette lay sleeping off the shock of her terrible experience, André and his brother set out for the home of Etienne Concomot.

In André's breast pocket lay curled a dog-whip, and his face was set of purpose.

BLUE BOOK'S CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Edited by
Albert H. Morehead

This type of crossword puzzle is designed to present an exercise for your imagination rather than a test of your vocabulary. In

other words, the difficulty is not in the words themselves, but in the definitions. The main types used are the anagram, the enigma,

the hidden word and—for variety and to keep you guessing—some straight dictionary definitions. (Solution on page 121.)

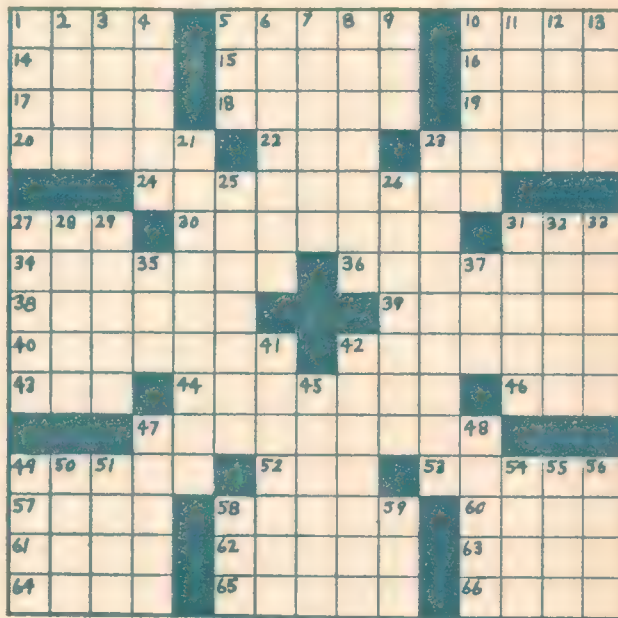
ACROSS

- 1 Usually encased in a shoe
- 5 Bound to be adept
- 10 Mark in arcs
- 14 Appeases when these are doubled
- 15 Around Nan that is silly
- 16 Reap the wild rind
- 17 Tor would make tear a flood
- 18 'Tain't a giant
- 19 Dry raid
- 20 Deposit of nitre
- 22 First thought in securities
- 23 Hidden locations are as hard to find
- 24 They're sorry, or so they represent
- 27 Wrong if faux
- 30 The former passage is only an excuse
- 31 The Golden — of Lucius Apuleius
- 34 Made a note of ten deer
- 36 Adeline is woven of whole cloth
- 38 Soared around, and now loves it
- 39 This enemy is without a manager
- 40 Changed and is now diverse
- 42 Rankles around four down
- 43 Encompasses the point
- 44 Sets deeply in order to snore
- 46 River indeed
- 47 Style Nine is excessively complicated
- 49 Little can in the center of the street
- 52 The best six games
- 53 Periods which are less, yet more, than eras
- 57 Run, deer (*ante* is before, of course)
- 58 Woven by Rosie

- 60 A first bee would cause confusion of a second son
- 61 A cross is protection in a cage
- 62 Roped into a card game
- 63 Oaks look around for a resting place
- 64 An en would give the words extent
- 65 Remove R and find ease
- 66 Mr. Tutt's partner

DOWN

- 1 German spy starts to commit suicide
- 2 Frank starts to bring up nepotism
- 3 Ejected from the nest
- 4 Steer away from the radicals
- 5 Tom sang "Willow"
- 6 A liqueur's flavor must be eased in
- 7 It's evident that Patrick is around 10
- 8 Is deca ten? Then that's accomplished
- 9 You'll study in the end
- 10 Booms with the Coast Guard
- 11 The car will start if you so desire
- 12 Anti-aircraft covers the air around Rhode Island
- 13 A short and crumpled dress found in Russia
- 21 Enters per arrangement to act as a substitute
- 23 Yells "Rats!" in an ingenuous manner
- 25 I'd go in now to see the president
- 26 Only an interpreter could make out XGT with ease
- 27 Spare the trees
- 28 Famous jockey (Earle) in the mountains



- 29 Stevedore gets hot, drops reed
- 31 Directed to use diversified media
- 32 Reason is nothing more than a delusion
- 33 Slaves are rising in significance
- 35 He felt his ire rising (Numbers 26.16)
- 37 Good music returns, tra-la
- 41 The bureau can arrange for compensation
- 42 Supports are away from a fortress
- 45 One Cantor's wife is an Iroquois
- 47 Still, S is only an insert
- 48 Affirmative voters begin rising
- 49 The opening seems to be lost
- 50 This guy is concave at the extremities
- 51 Extirpate the trite out, but leave the point in
- 54 Arabic father that loved his fellow men
- 55 Fret about being deprived
- 56 Last to strip
- 58 Think if open could open to take in
- 59 Take eggs from George's; leave eggs

This time we must win the peace as well as the war, and the immediate post-war situation is a matter of deep interest. . . . Here Mr. Keynes again ventures a prophetic drama of the fight for a successful peace.



Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson



A STORY OF TOMORROW

by Gordon Keyne

Cairo Midnight

THE glamour of old Cairo, if you ask me, is not what it has been painted. Yet it was in Cairo that East and West came together, the savagely fanatical Orient meeting the Four Freedoms of the Occident face to face. It was here that Andrew Lessing, that evil genius of the world following the Last War, spun a deathly web. And it was here that I made a ruddy ass of myself, alas!

Three days after reaching Cairo I was sitting in our hotel room, a prey to gloom, when the phone summoned me.

It was a long-distance call from Bagdad for Norman Shane.

"This is Mr. Hammond, his secretary," I rejoined. "All right? Then go ahead. Who is it? Kessiloy? Yes, yes!"

Despite my gloom, the name of Kessiloy braced me. This great Russian who had succeeded to the powers of Stalin at the end of the war, had been

expected to meet us here—but to now, nothing had been heard from him.

"Good evening, Mr. Hammond," came his voice. "Is Norman Shane there?"

"He was taken to the English Hospital this afternoon," I replied. "It's a malignant fever of some kind; they've called a London specialist."

"Shane ill? That's bad news," he said. "We landed in Bagdad an hour ago with engine trouble. Getting another plane out at once and should be in Cairo before midnight. Sir Abdul Mohand is with me. We'd like to get quarters at your hotel."

"A suite?"

"By no means. A room for two. And don't use our names, of course."

"The hotel is discreet. I'll reserve the room in my own name, for two friends."

"Thank you," he responded, and rang off.

I jumped into a taxicab and hurried to the hospital, that splendid

structure near the Bulac Bridge, erected by the British toward the close of the war.

At this moment Norman Shane's illness was a tragedy. We had escaped a trap set by Lessing in the Libyan Desert—that man and those behind him, representing worldwide interests, were savagely resolved to get rid of Shane. Destiny had, apparently, now done it for them.

The period of transition following the war was going badly. True, Shane had planted the International Court of Justice firmly in control of the new order of things. Behind him were aligned men of vast power and influence in the Coalition of the Four Freedoms; such men as Kessiloy in Russia and Sir Abdul Mohand in India. True, this Freedoms Coalition was dominating the peace conference in Vienna and the Asiatic Congress in New Delhi and enforcing the Atlantic Charter upon all the earth. This new world of science and discovery was

witnessing a resurgence of idealism, of real brotherhood of man—

And yet, is ever the devil truly dead?

Reaction, selfish interests, national and private greed, were secretly leagued to defeat the Four Freedoms. They could only be fought and beaten by similar undercover forces: Shane was the ideal man for the job. But now, as I hung over his bedside, it came to me that if he died, our whole cause might well perish with him. Simpleton that I was!

The doctors had given me a scant five minutes with him. He extended to me a paper; I took it and read what he had scrawled there:

Hammond will act for me in all things, with my full authority.

Norman Shane

"But this is impossible, Norman!" I said chokingly. His faint smile stole forth.

"No such word, Ham. You're on the inside of everything; carry on! Was Lessing caught? Was she, Vera Ley—"

"Nothing has been heard of either one. Lessing is a fugitive now, of course."

His aspect frightened me, for he looked like death.

"Trust Kessiloy," he said, when I had told him of the phone call. "And Abdul. Plenty of honest men in the world. I bank on you three, Ham; honesty plus ability. And if you hear from her—from Vera Ley—trust her, too. Wean her away from them. Pay any price. . . ."

His voice grew weak and the doctors intervened. They were alarmed; but Sir John Wells was on the way from London and they were having a consultation later that night. Now they banished me and everyone else from Shane's room.

Trust Vera Ley! Not likely, I thought bitterly; and yet, in my heart, I knew she wished Shane no ill. She was simply used as a tool by Lessing, and was somehow in his power. That was all we did know; but she was one of the most remarkable women alive just the same.

I put in a few desperate hours at our hotel, checking over Shane's notes and plans. The Hotel du Nil was an unassuming and small but comfortable French hostelry in the Rue en-Nasr, in the Geziret quarter—one part of Cairo which had escaped the conflagration during the post-war riots of the Pan-Islam League.

MIDNIGHT came and passed. My phone rang. Our two friends had arrived; I had forgotten all about them in my rush of work. Now I went to their room posthaste, tired and anxious, hobbling down the hall as fast as my crippled foot would permit. Their room was at the end of

the corridor. So I came face to face with those men for the first time.

Kessiloy! Those broad peasant features with the high brow and flaring nostrils were boyish yet commanding; they were at once nobly placid and ignobly cruel. Upon my mind flashed Shane's oft-repeated dictum anent the strength of serenity; but the strength of this man was barbaric. A tremendous, massive sense of power flowed out of him as we shook hands, and then he introduced me to Sir Abdul Mohand.

What a difference! Here was the renowned scientist, the lofty spirit whose labors had reached so far, the physicist who had continued the researches of California's Millikin. With his liquid, grave Hindu eyes he was the gentlest and handsomest man I have ever seen.

"We've just had a word with Shane," Kessiloy said casually.

I started.

"What do you mean? They won't let him see a soul."

The Russian laughed. "Abdul is one of the world's great physicians, my friend! Yes, we went there direct from the airport and found them in consultation. We stayed."

I looked at Sir Abdul. "What's the verdict about his case?"

"It's grave but far from desperate. He has a form of rheumatic fever; his nerves are frayed and exhausted. He must have a month of absolute rest and sunlight therapy. For that, the Upper Nile is ideal. They'll send him tomorrow. We'll not see him again."

"But," added Kessiloy, "I've assured him that we'll carry on his work. He has deputed his powers to you, he said."

"Yes," I murmured. His powers! Never before in history did one man have such powers; and they were now on the shoulders of a weakling, a cripple. Kessiloy must have read my thought, for he put out a hand and squeezed my arm, kindness lighting up his broad face.

"Shane says you're fully competent; good! We three will stand together."

"And eat likewise," put in Sir Abdul. "We need food and sleep; I've ordered sandwiches. I suggest that we talk for an hour, discuss the situation, sleep until tomorrow noon and then get down to hard work."

So we did. From the very start, these big men of the East had a comradely air that put me at ease, and we were soon intimate. We were entirely at one in our aims and objectives, and as always, I found once more that the greatest of men are the simplest.

The Four Freedoms, represented by the International Court of Justice, were by no means established in the Near and Far East. Australia and

China and Russia had emerged from the war as standard-bearers of justice and equality; none the less, the old vested interests, represented by the Pan-Islam League, were in bitter opposition. The things we had resolved should never again happen—conflict, social injustice, economic monopoly and war—again were peering over the horizon.

"Apparently key men are at work," Kessiloy said. "Pan-Islam, directed by Nafras Pasha here in Cairo, is our immediate problem. It threatens to disrupt India and the Asiatic Congress. I think your man Lessing must be backing Nafras, who personally is a weakling."

NOT a weakling, I knew; rather a shuttlecock. Handsome, distinguished, wealthy, he was actually a front for others, I had gleaned from Shane's notes. I said as much.

"The big man in Pan-Islam is of course the old and venerated Khalil, Sheikh ul Islam; by any viewpoint, he's pretty much a saint. Nafras Pasha has him under his thumb, somehow. Khalil is the real heart and core of the whole Pan-Islam movement. Can we reach him?"

"No one can, except by consent of Nafras, whose men are all around him," said Kessiloy thoughtfully. "At the same time—it might be done. Hm!"

"The most potent force is thought," observed Sir Abdul, munching a sandwich. "The greatest objective, even of the gods, is justice. The keenest weapon is love for mankind. But," he added, with an impish twinkle in his eye, "direct action is never a mistake. Eh, Hammond?"

"Right," I said, smiling at his expression. "If old Khalil were removed from the alleged protection of Nafras Pasha—"

"Huge and fanatical robbery would be kicked up in every Moslem country! No, can't dream of such a thing. And yet, one word from Khalil would reduce the entire Moslem world to obedience. His spiritual influence is terrific."

"What's the pay-off?" I demanded. "What is Nafras after?"

"The old Pan-Islam dream of a united bloc of Moslem nations to make war upon the weakened world," said Kessiloy. "That's the gist of it. They're threatening to withdraw from the Asiatic Congress, even to provoke armed conflict and start a new war. If they can get Khalil to proclaim a jihad, a holy war, there'll be hell to pay."

"Suppose we sleep on it and start fresh tomorrow," I suggested, and they nodded. We said good night and separated.

Ordinarily the presence of these two men would have stirred Cairo



"I've been ordered to keep you entertained," she said, as we mounted the stairs. "I shall do so, in my own way."

mightily; but they had come in strict incognito. No one guessed they were not still in New Delhi; even the authorities knew nothing of their presence. It was necessary, of course, for them to keep away from me overtly, for as Shane's secretary I was a marked man.

Next day they came to my room where luncheon was already served and was waiting.

I had remembered Shane's injunction about Vera Ley, and we discussed her puzzling activities. Both knew of

her; Kessiloy had met her, and he now said a startling thing:

"Her husband, Field Marshal Vol-dimar Ley, was supposedly killed in Siberia by the Japs. I have sometimes thought he might still be alive; I knew him well, you see. He was a remarkable man; she is a remarkable woman. He vanished in Siberia, yes; but his death was never verified.

Queer things can happen in that country."

The phone summoned me. And, upon my honor, it was Vera Ley on the line.

"Hello, Mr. Hammond!" she said. "Is Mr. Shane there?"

"Not at the moment, Madame Ley," I said. Kessiloy's gaze jumped at me. Sir Abdul lifted his head and stared.

"When would it be convenient for me to see him? I must see him personally; it's urgent and must be some-time today."

"Perhaps this evening?" I suggested. "If you like, I'll phone him and ring you back in five minutes."

"Thank you. Ezbekieh 1120 is the number."

I laid down the phone and grinned at my guests. "Well, gentlemen? What time would you care to receive Madame Ley?"

"Seven o'clock," said Kessiloy. He comprehended everything in a flash. "That will be dark; but before dinner. They dine late here. Where is she?"

"Haven't the faintest idea," I said. He leaped up.

"You got her telephone number? Quick!"

I told him and he rushed out. Sir Abdul smiled and nodded at me.

"Impetuous, eh? But he does things, in his way. She wants to see Shane, eh? Seven o'clock will suit me, yes."

I liked his quiet calm; he was never excited. I called back the number and Vera Ley answered. The hour suited her; she would come to our rooms then. It was all very casual. Where was she? At the question she only laughed softly and hung up.

"They are sending her," said Sir Abdul. "An ultimatum to Shane. Lessing must trust her. Well, things are happening; what? We do not know. The safest thing is to do nothing. I shall put on a pair of dark spectacles and go out and see Cairo."

And so he did, leaving me holding the empty bag.

It was five o'clock when Kessiloy tapped at my door. When he came in, I did not know him. He had applied a rather dark stain to his face and hands, completely changing his appearance, and wore flashy sports clothes. He chuckled at my expression and took a chair.

"Do you know, it took me a long time to run down that telephone number? Yes, and was expensive; but I did it. A private number belonging to a telephone in the El Farag palace, on the Nile below the Embaba Bridge—not far from here, either. It's one of the old Mameluke palaces, and it belongs to Nafras Pasha."

He lit a cigarette and seemed well satisfied with himself.

"She's coming here at seven," I told him, and he nodded.

"Good. At nine, Nafras Pasha and the old saint, Khalil, are receiving me."

"What!" I cried, staring at him. He smiled.

"Yes. Ivan Turgenev, just arrived from New Delhi with a message from that scoundrel Kessiloy—in fact, I'm his confidential secretary. Interesting, eh? They'd give a good deal to win Kessiloy over to their side! Where's Abdul?"

I told him, and he shrugged. "But what," I asked, "is the purpose in this masquerade of yours?"

"Confuse the enemy—object number one. Beyond that, learn what I can." His eyes flashed and he became intent. "We must draw these threads together somehow; Vera Ley, Lessing the mysterious, old Khalil, and the rather transparent Nafras Pasha! When we hit, we must hit all at once. You have met this Lessing; what is he like?"

I told him, describing Lessing minutely. Frankly, I thought him mad to venture on such an errand, trusting to a bit of dark dye. The pictures of Kessiloy were too well known; he could not hope to deceive such men as he was going to meet at the house of Nafras Pasha. However, I knew I could not dissuade him.

"Can't answer for Abdul," he said, "but I think I'll not trade words with Vera Ley when she comes. Can I listen without being seen?"

"Take Shane's room," I replied, pointing to the connecting door. He went in, took a look at the room, and came back.

"Good. Y' know, Hammond, this isn't a mere passing adventure. We

must carry on for Shane, the three of us; it means a month or two of damned delicate work, unless we can put a quietus on this chap Lessing. He's the devil in person. Hello! Here's Abdul!"

I opened to Sir Abdul's knock and he came in, pulling off a pair of dark glasses. He looked at Kessiloy without surprise, and smiled, as he dropped into a chair.

"A bit of bad news," he said. "I saw Nafras Pasha returning from an audience with the King. I recognized his chauffeur; he is a Rajput, a Moslem, named Hari Lal, who was once employed as a professional murderer by the old Rajah of Koland. India became too hot for him and he vanished. Assassination is his specialty. What it means I know not; but it is bad."

It was going to mean plenty before long, when the threads would come together!

At seven o'clock to the minute there came a tap at the door. I shut the door of the adjoining room, in which were Sir Abdul and Kessiloy, and admitted Madame Ley.

She shook hands, smiling. As usual, she was exquisitely dressed; her quiet



"So! Assassination, eh?" Lessing grunted. "You



meant to kill me. I figured this would be your play."

beauty made it hard to believe she was a woman of forty or so. The magic of her dark eyes, the compelling music of her voice, revealed what a woman in a million she actually was.

"Where is Mr. Shane?" she asked, seeing at a glance the room was empty.

"Not here," I said. "And I can't say where. I'm sorry. But Sir Abdul Mohand is in the next room; he wants to meet you. I thought you might want to see me privately."

She was startled by this frankness. I went on quickly:

"Shane was called away to Alexandria at a moment's notice; his plane just left. He gave me a message for you. He said to trust you—and to bring you over to our side at any price."

I had calculated the effect of these words aright. She was a friend, yet she worked with the enemy; and Shane's command to trust her brought a warm glow into her eyes.

"I'm sorry," she replied. "Actually, I'm here as a messenger from Lessing to bring an ultimatum."

This gave me a start. Almost the exact words of Sir Abdul's prediction!

"Give it to me," I said, when I had placed her in a chair. "Have you any private word—anything that Mohand can't hear?"

"Unfortunately, no," she replied quietly. "Something is planned for tomorrow; I don't know what it is. I can't warn you this time."

I opened the connecting door and called Sir Abdul. He came in, bowed as I introduced him, and after the usual amenities Madame Ley lit a cigarette and gave her message. If she was surprised to find Sir Abdul here, she did not show it. He had left the door open, so that Kessiloy could hear all we said.

Lessing's terms were cool and imperious. First, immunity for himself. Second, the International Court of Justice was to withdraw its committees from the Near East and the Far East. The Atlantic Charter was not to be extended to Asia, or rather to the countries in the Pan-Islam League, which was to replace the Freedoms Coalition in these countries.

"You ask a lot," I said. "The committees of the International Court are now operating in control of all these countries. If we assent—what then?"

"All opposition to your Freedoms Coalition elsewhere will be withdrawn," she said. "In fact, we will work with you in other parts of the world."

SIR ABDUL laughed in his shy, pleasant way.

"I am not a Christian," he said, "But I seem to recall something from the Christian Scriptures about a certain temptation—the kingdoms of the world and the glory thereof! So Mr. Lessing is willing to share the world, eh?"

"In effect, yes," said Madame Ley. "If you refuse, before noon tomorrow you'll be sorry. Such a blow will be struck that Islam will rise in a frenzy, the holy war will be proclaimed, and the International Court will never recover from the effects of the blow. This is no fantasy, I assure you; it is a most solemn threat."

"I am empowered to speak for Shane," I said. "But I prefer to give my answer face to face. I think Lessing is at the house of Nafras Pasha; I've had no search made there for him and will make none, if you'll persuade him to see me."

Her face paled slightly. "They said you—or Shane—would ask that. Very well; it is agreed. I'll take you back there with me. But, I beg of you, don't go! I can warn you against this; it is a trap to get Mr. Shane."

"They can get me, instead," I said. Sir Abdul leaned forward. "Let me intervene one moment," he said gently. "Madame Ley, what hold do these people have over you?"

She started slightly, then relaxed as she met his kindly gaze.

"I—I cannot tell you that," she said, almost unsteadily. "I dare not."

"We have influence, wealth, power," went on Sir Abdul. "I have been talking with Norman Shane about making a place for you in our work—no little place either."

"Useless," she said. I caught a desperate look in her eye for an instant. "No, it is useless. I must do as I am told. You are right, they have forced me to work with them; there is no help."

"It has something to do with your husband, Voldimar Ley. I can read it in your mind."

She came to her feet, as though in panic. "No, no! I cannot discuss it." She turned to me. "Lessing is not there now. I'll pick you up here a little before nine and take you; they have a conference at nine, and after that will see you. Satisfactory?"

"Quite," I said.

Her dark eyes were anguished. "Oh, refuse, refuse!" she broke out in agitation. "I tell you it's a trap!"

"For an elephant. I'm only a mouse, a crippled mouse at that,"

I said, smiling. "So they won't waste elephant ammunition on me."

She drooped. "Very well: I'm sorry."

"I shall be waiting at the entrance, after eight-thirty," I said. She nodded to us and went away without a word more.

Kessiloy came into the room and scowled at us.

"Interesting! What blow can they strike tomorrow? It's some sort of a Moslem holiday, but that means nothing. Hm! Hammond, you'd better keep out of the lion's den."

"No," I said. I had a purpose, but would not tell them. "I'm going with her. And now, Sir Abdul, I'd like to let General Blount know you're here. He's the head of the committee of occupation in Cairo, under the International Court, and is Shane's key man in Egypt."

Sir Abdul had no objection. A deceptively quiet and gentle man, this Indian; but as I was to learn later, he had some amazing qualities and abilities.

I was a fool not to take those two men into my confidence. In fact, I was a fool to plan as I did. But, remember, I was next door to despair over the whole situation; the illness of Shane, the responsibility on me, had me almost frantic. I was simply off balance, and that is the truth. I was adopting the only way out that occurred to me.

At eight-thirty I was waiting at the entrance of the little hotel, stick in hand.

A car drew up; the voice of Madame Ley addressed me. The chauffeur stepped out and held open the door. He was a slim dark man. I wondered whether he were the professional murderer Sir Abdul had mentioned. My wonder was at once answered when Vera Ley gave me her hand as I got in, and a quick word when the door slammed behind me.

"Careful, stubborn man! Not a word here."

I settled down beside her, the chauffeur took his seat, and we were off at once.

We had not a great way to go. My companion instructed the driver to use the old entrance, and turned to me with a laugh.

"I'm taking you in through the old part of the house; you'll enjoy it. There's a new wing, of course."

She was casual, brightly pleasant, as though a few days back we had parted like old friends, instead of upon the very brink of torture and violent death. She and Lessing must have regarded it as a miracle that we had escaped that death-trap in the Libyan Desert.

The car halted at last beside the long steps of a portico. We got out;

two servants greeted us with respectful salaams and held open a door. I followed her into fairyland.

Here was one of those old Cairene patios celebrated in story. The world was shut away; oranges and fig trees scented the night. Magnificent tiled fountains jetted sprays of water on the air. About two sides of the patio rose the house, a glory of carved and inlaid woodwork. The stairs to which she led me were supported by delicate marble columns, and the windows were overlaid by those intricately carved screens for which Cairo is famed. Glorious carpets and cushions were scattered about. It was a glimpse from the Arabian Nights.

"I've been ordered to keep you entertained until they're ready to talk with you," she said, as we mounted the stairs. "I shall do so, in my own way."

She touched finger to lips; I guessed that we were watched or overheard.

At the second floor she led me through magnificent old rooms into a corridor, and this took us to the newer portion of the building. And so into an ornate, plushy drawing-room where an immense black Nubian served us heavenly coffee and tendered us magnificent royal cigarettes as long as cigars. We chatted of trifles; Madame Ley was, obviously, out to kill a bit of time. I had no objection.

"Would you like to see the conference that's going on?" she asked suddenly; then she rose. "Come along. There's no objection."

My heart pounded. She led me into another corridor, and from that into a handsome room closed at one end by screens hanging from the ceiling. Finger on lips, she took me to these screens, and then breathed a word at my ear.

"For the amusement of the harem—the women. Be quiet!"

Through the screen, quite distinctly, I could see a magnificent chamber somewhat below our level. Though I could hear nothing, I could see everything.

Here were seated, smoking and talking, three men; another sat by himself. This other was the old and saintly Khalil, a venerable, bearded man with intensely beautiful features, the only man I ever saw who really looked like a saint; and by all accounts he was indeed one. But the other three—

One was Lessing, dynamic and dominating; a lean dark force, his aquiline face alight with energy and brilliance. Another was Nafras Pasha, indolent and sensual, plump, smiling, handsome in his way. And the third I did not know—until suddenly I caught my breath. By the gods! Kessiloy!

He was completely changed. The nobility was gone from him; he was a supreme actor, expressing mean-

ness, slimy trickery, cupidity in every feature. His very smile was an oily triumph. When he stood up, his whole body slouched. He was subservient, even servile.

Vera Ley touched my arm and I followed her back to the room we had left. She stood and looked at me, inquiringly.

"You had a reason for coming tonight," she said quietly. "Lessing has a reason for wanting you; he wanted Shane, but he will use you. Did you see that man talking to them? He is Kessiloy's private secretary, and one of us. Now—where is Norman Shane?"

"I don't know; a secret meeting somewhere," I said. "He went first to Alexandria."

"So you would come!" she breathed softly, sadly. "And tomorrow the world will be shocked to the depths—and then Islam will rise in fury. If I had seen Norman Shane, all might have been so different! Good-by. I am sorry."

She turned from me and clapped her hands. Two big blacks came into the room. She pointed at me, and they came at me.

I did not realize their intent until too late; I had no chance to put up any sort of defense. They simply grabbed me, searched me, and took from my pocket the little pistol I had meant to use on Lessing when I came face to face with him. They held me by the arms, and then Lessing stalked in, with Nafras Pasha following him. He flung a look and an order at Madame Ley.

"Well done. Go and pack; we leave in fifteen minutes."

Then he came and stood in front of me, chewing a cigar. He took the little pistol and grunted.

"So! Assassination, eh? You meant to kill me. I thought you would."

THE infernal devil! I was speechless. He laughed in my face as he said jeeringly:

"We heard Shane was not at the hotel; I figured this would be your play. Well, what about the ultimatum? I'm not bluffing, you know. Will Shane accept?"

"No," I said. He studied me thoughtfully, and I realized how keen and terrible were his eyes.

"So the two of you got away from our friends in Libya. Where's Shane now?"

"I don't know," I said truthfully. "He left for a meeting. Alexandria first."

"So much the worse for him and you. A desperate little man, aren't you, Hammond? Well, you'll be set at liberty tomorrow morning, so be at ease."

He turned to Nafras Pasha.

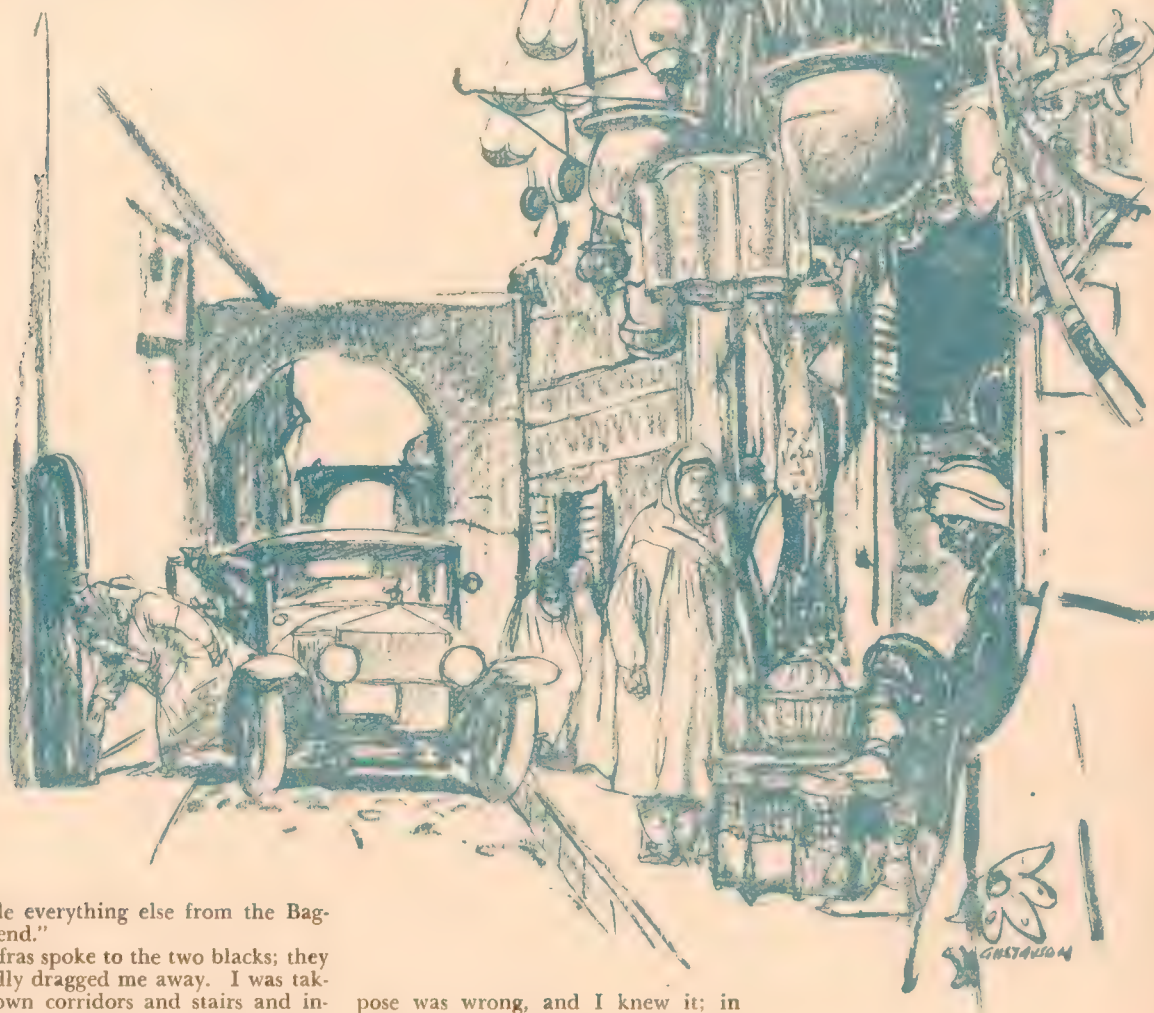
"All right; everything's in your hands now. Let our friend speak

with this fellow and satisfy himself we've really got Shane's secretary. Entertain Turgenev well, give him all he asks, and let him go back to Kessiloy after the arrangements are made. Any word from the printers?"

"Everything will be ready," said Nafras Pasha, nodding heavily. "The handbills will be prepared and delivered here in an hour; the signature of Khalil will appear on the proclamations to be distributed later."

Lessing laughed. "He won't be able to object then. Very well. Keep this fellow safe till morning. I'll

*Khalil, despite raging protest, was hurried in-
to a bazaar.*



handle everything else from the Bagdad end."

Nafras spoke to the two blacks; they literally dragged me away. I was taken down corridors and stairs and into a small, decently furnished room. They tossed me on a bed there, laughing, and went away. The door clanged; it was metal. By the light of the electric bulb in the ceiling, I saw a small, high window crossed by iron bars. I was a prisoner.

So this was the end of my mad purpose; I sat overcome by humiliation and bitterness. I had intended to kill Lessing; I confess it freely. It was a natural temptation. That man was a menace to humanity. Yet the pur-

pose was wrong, and I knew it; in desperation I had flung ideals overboard, and this failure was to be my punishment.

A clang from the door roused me. I looked up as it opened; into the room came Nafras Pasha and Kessiloy, with two black guards. The plump Egyptian gave me a glance, then turned to Kessiloy.

"I will not remain," he said. "Satisfy yourself; talk with him, then you will be shown to your room, my friend."

He departed. Kessiloy came and sat down beside me. Even now, close at hand, I could scarcely believe he was this fawning, oily rascal.

The two black guards, leaving the door open, retired into the corridor where they could watch us but not overhear us.

"Pretend to talk, Hammond," said Kessiloy quietly. "We're in a fix. This is the most diabolic thing I ever

imagined, all of it. We must stop it, somehow. Do you speak French?"

I assented. He proffered cigarettes, and I took one.

"Old Khalil speaks French. We must reach him," Kessiloy went on. "They mean to kill you tomorrow. I'll get you away later tonight; no trouble about that. I'm remaining here; I'll be of more use thus. When they bring you cakes and sherbet, dispose of the sherbet without eating it, for it will be heavily drugged. Also the cigarettes. Can't afford to have your wits all doped up with hashish. See you later, then. I think we'll manage it."

He left me, nodding and laughing. The door clanged shut again and I was alone—and bewildered. What it meant, I could not tell. After a little, a guard appeared with a tray, which he respectfully left. On the tray were cigarettes, sherbet, and delicious little cakes. I dumped the sherbet under the far corner of the bed, with two of the cigarettes, and smoked one of my own. When they came to take away the tray and turn out my light, I was sound asleep on the bed, apparently.

I lay there for hours, forcing myself to keep awake. I could guess that my one high window opened on gardens, from the fresh earthy smell and occasional flower scents. Why would they want to drug me? It was all very mysterious; but I trusted Kessiloy.

MY nerves jumped at a sound—the clank-clank of a bar slid back. Then the door came open and in the darkness I heard Kessiloy's voice:

"Hammond! Lend me a hand. Here at the door. With this black fellow."

I went to aid him; we lifted the limp form of my guard to the bed. Something warm and sticky covered my hand; blood. A ruthlessly efficient man, this Russian!

"Come along," said Kessiloy. "Talk later. We've much to do, and you must be off and away before the relief finds this chap done for."

"Right," I said, and went with him. He had an electric flashlight which he used most guardedly. He was an overnight guest in the house, it appeared, and was taking advantage of the fact. He seemed to know his way around, too—what a man he was! Cool, quiet, capable and deadly.

I followed blindly until he flashed the light on a door and halted. This was the room occupied by Khalil, the venerable old saint.

"Here's our chance to scotch the whole thing at one crack," said he softly. "The plan is to murder him tomorrow morning and throw the blame on us. He's going to visit the El Azhar mosque and preach there. It's a big Moslem festival of some

kind. But on the way there, he's to be killed by a Frangite* grenade; it won't give him an earthly chance."

He instructed me swiftly in my part of the work. I listened intently; but at the back of my brain I began to understand Lessing's diabolic scheme. Such an outrage would indeed shock the whole world of Islam into frenzied action. With the blame cleverly fastened on the Freedoms Coalition and Shane, such a fanatical flame would be roused as to threaten total disruption of all we were doing.

So at last I understood; Kessiloy told me everything he had learned—they had held nothing back from him. If I failed with Khalil, I would have to bolt for it and consult with Sir Abdul on what action to take.

"I'll await you here," concluded Kessiloy. "Go ahead! They've prepared handbills for distribution, also proclamations supposedly signed by Khalil calling for a holy war; unluckily I haven't been able to get hold of them. But I'll manage it before morning."

I knocked at the door, found it unlocked, and went in, speaking in French as I did so, in order not to alarm the old chap; but I doubt if he had even been asleep. He switched on a light and sat cross-legged, fingering a Moslem rosary and blinking at me. I told him who I was. He did not seem a particle astonished. I went on to recount the plot to kill him and urged him to accompany me to a safe place.

"All men are liars," he responded placidly. "God alone knows the truth; great is God! Am I to believe a little lame man who speaks evil of my friends, an infidel Nazarene who befouls true believers?"

And there he stuck. He simply refused to believe a word I said and was quite calm about it, too. When he began to lose his temper, I gave up and went back to Kessiloy, who heard my report and nodded.

"I was afraid of that; he's under the thumb of Nafras. Well, we've done our best. Come along and I'll get you out of here. I was shown over the whole place, so I have it in my head. The gardens run down to the river and you can probably get away there, though we may have a bit of trouble."

"But what about this plot?" I demanded helplessly. "What about—"

He laughed softly. "Tell Abdul. He has more brains than both of us put together."

Certainly I had not shown any brain-work this night, and said so. He chuckled.

*Named for the Czech chemist, Frangien, who toward the close of the war discovered the control of this frightful liquid oxygen explosive.

"Who knows? All's for the best. And your life is safe. Lessing promised you'd be set free tomorrow; a lie. They plan to kill you and make it appear that you and Shane were responsible for the murder of old Khalil. Come along."

IT was getting on to two in the morning; the house was deathly still. There was no moon, but the starlight was balmy and sweet, awaiting the miracle of dawn which comes in Egypt with a springing life, an *élan*, unmatched elsewhere on earth.

We got into the gardens and hurried along. Toward the river were lofty trees, a summer-house, boundary walls to right and left, and then a floating pier at which boats were moored. Kessiloy halted before reaching this pier.

"There's a watchman ahead," he breathed. "Those black servants of Nafras Pasha are ugly customers. Better go straight at him. I'll chuck him overboard, you take a boat and drop downstream with the current. After a hundred yards or so, streets come down to the water and you can slip ashore anywhere."

A marvelous fellow, Kessiloy; one would think he had been born here, instead of being a perfect stranger.

In the starlight we walked straight out on the floating dock. Sure enough, a watchman showed up and addressed us sharply in challenge. I made answer in French and this confused him. Then Kessiloy blinded the man with his flashlight and went right at him like a bull. The black tumbled off the dock with a stifled yell—and unexpectedly, three more blacks showed up, darting at us with long knives out and ready to use.

For a minute or two there was the devil to pay. I took on one of the three, luckily tripped him, and sent him rolling into the water. The other two were so close to carving Kessiloy up that he slid out a pistol and shot point-blank.

"Get away!" came his command. "They'll think you did it. I'm all right. Quick!"

There was no time to fumble around with any boats. I am a good swimmer, despite my bad foot. Pausing only to get rid of my coat, I took a header into the Nile and struck out downstream for dear life.

That shot from Kessiloy's pistol had kicked up a rumpus and no mistake. I got his idea; the entire blame would be given me, of course. No doubt he was now dodging back to his own room and safety. I paid strict attention to making speed; presently I sighted a street coming down to the water, and crawled ashore by the embankment.

Trailing Nile water, I set out to walk, and after a bit sighted a cruising cab. The rest was easy.

At the hotel, I got Sir Abdul out of bed. By the time I was changing into dry clothes he was in my room, listening to my story. He broke in once.

"You say you intended to kill Lessing? You went for that reason?"

"Yes. Don't rub it in. I was a terrible idiot—"

"Good! Good!" he said placidly. "I like a man who makes mistakes; I like you. The gods preserve me from the careful man who makes no mistakes! He gets nowhere. But continue."

I did. Then, just as Kessiloy had told me, I described the plot set to break in the morning. It was simple and deadly. Old Khalil was to be driven in the car of Nafras Pasha to the El Azhar mosque. Before reaching there the car would pass along the Sikket-el-Badistan, cutting through the bazaar of the brass-workers. Just before reaching a gateway in this street named El Kabwa, the car would stop.

Hari Lal, the driver, would pull the pin from the grenade in the seat beside him and duck into a brass-shop where he would have friends waiting. The car and anyone in the vicinity would be blown to hell, including Khalil. Such was the plan, amplified by certain measures making it evident that the thing was a Christian plot. And then—the deluge!

"A GOOD plan," said Sir Abdul without excitement.

"We'll have to nip it!" I exclaimed. "Better seize everybody in that house—"

"Softly, Hammond!" he broke in. "What is the prime object of our activity?"

"To checkmate Lessing, of course. To win over the Pan-Islam League to our side!"

"Ah! There you have it. Win them over, yes; discredit Nafras Pasha. Hm! Lessing has taken to cover, from what you say. If he reaches Bagdad, we'll have trouble. We'd better tip off the Air Control—they may get his plane *en route*. But I advise letting the death-plot go its way."

"What?" I stared at him, incredulous. "And let old Khalil get killed?"

He smiled. "Not necessarily." It was a favorite phrase of his. "Although by all accounts he'd go straight to the Moslem paradise. D'you suppose you could get General Blount here—immediately?"

"Yes," I replied, and went to the phone. I resolved to gamble on Sir Abdul's brains.

To get the head of the International Court's occupation committee, the man actually in chief authority in Cairo and Egypt, to our hotel at this hour of the morning, was no joke.

However, Norman Shane's name accomplished it. Half an hour later he walked into the room, a trim, rock-jawed Australian and a real pukka sahib. He sat down and then we went to it, and before we finished our guest was sweating.

Sir Abdul Mohand outlined the operations that he favored, and his words drew a gasp from Blount. I felt much the same way. Sir Abdul gave his reasons and they were excellent, but General Blount shook his head.

"Gad, no! I'd not risk it for worlds!"

"I think Norman Shane would," I put in.

"It's crack-brained! It's lunatic! It's taking quite needless risks!"

"I agree with you. And yet I see no other chance of winning greatly. Merely to avoid risk and danger is not winning a victory."

He gave me a cold, hard look.

"It's your responsibility, Mr. Hammond. You're acting for Shane. If you give the order, I'll carry it out; but under protest, mind!"

I confess to an instant of hesitation; the responsibility was indeed frightful.

"All right; agreed," I said, and the warmth in Sir Abdul's eyes was my reward. "Do it."

"Very well." Blount drew a deep breath and rose. "But you understand that any one of a hundred details may go wrong and spoil the show."

"Not necessarily." Sir Abdul spoke gently with his favorite phrase. "Would you care to have me go with you and assist in planning the details?"

Blount jumped at this. "Come along, Sir Abdul! My car's outside."

That left nothing for me to do except go to bed. Eventually I got some sleep—the sort of sleep a condemned man gets the night before he treads the gallows. For I saw utter disaster ahead.

Now, of course, the whole world knows what happened next morning, but the details have never been made public. Here they are:

Old Saint Khalil was to speak at the El Azhar mosque, heart of the greatest Islam university extant, at nine o'clock sharp. At eight-thirty the car, driven by Hari Lal the Rajput, left the house of Nafras Pasha; Khalil was alone in the rear seat. Five minutes after it left, police raided the house, both from the street and from the river, and seized every soul in it except Kessiloy, who mysteriously was placed at liberty.

The car pursued its way. When it came to the gateway El Kabwa, it

halted; as it did so, half a dozen men in Arab costume converged swiftly upon it. Hari Lal opened the door beside him and jumped out. Before he reached the bazaar entrance opposite, he was seized and handcuffed. While this was going on, two men were opening the rear door and were in the car.

Khalil, despite his raging protests, was hauled out and hurried into a bazaar. As its shelter was reached, a tremendous explosion blew the car to bits, dug a gaping hole in the streets, shattered the bazaar-fronts near by and killed half a dozen people. Hari Lal was among those killed; a piece of the windshield was driven through his skull.

At the headquarters of the occupation committee, old Khalil was shown bales of the printed handbills announcing his assassination at Christian hands; also other bales of the proclamation supposedly signed by him calling the People of the Book, as the Moslems term themselves, to a holy war. This forgery opened his eyes.

He was then confronted with Nafras Pasha—who, in abject terror, made a complete confession. Everything moved with the precision of clockwork. It was barely nine-thirty when Khalil mounted the high pulpit in the El Azhar mosque and, with great agitation, called upon the Pan-Islam League to support the International Court of Justice and accept its mandates—which it eventually did, to the stupefaction and delight of the eastern world.

The plane carrying Andrew Lessing escaped all air-search. But, two days later, a wire addressed to Norman Shane came to the hotel. Kessiloy and Sir Abdul were with me when I opened it. We read it together:

CONGRATULATIONS. IF OFFER STILL OPEN LOOK UP MAHMUD THE SCRIBE BY THE COFFEE HOUSE OF THE BARBERS AT THE KHOTA BRIDGE.

There was no signature. The message had been sent from Bagdad an hour previously.

"It reads like a joke but smells like a trap," said Kessiloy warily. Sir Abdul smiled and shook his head, his eyes shining.

"No, no, my friend! Offer—what offer? Why, this was sent by Madame Ley, of course! And if I read it aright, she has changed her mind and we're about to gain a new recruit—and, by the thunderbolt of Siva, one of value!"

His words gave me a thrill. "Trust her!" Norman Shane had said. And now—was she actually coming over to our side? Did Sir Abdul read the unsigned message aright?

We took the night plane to Bagdad; our work in Cairo was finished.

Another dramatic story of "Tomorrow's Men" is scheduled for our forthcoming May issue.

Hairpin



I SEE this very pretty babe when she first come in the plant and I have her pegged right away as another one of these débutantes who thinks it's smart to work in a factory, and after they work eight hours or so, forget to show up again. But I can be wrong.

She is a dark-haired little trick all decked out in a new pair of slacks, and my heart does a quick rev which is no good for an old duck like me.

"Women!" the guy on the machine next to me says. "What do they want to bring 'em in here for? Shop's no place for a woman."

"Maybe," I say, "she'll get out production, which'd be a refreshing change around here." We have been lagging behind in our schedule for a month, and some of the older hands around the shop, including me, have the feeling the Government might take their shell contract away from us.

"You don't like it any better than I do," he says, "or any better than the

other fellows in the plant do, and Ramsey isn't going to like it either."

I am afraid the guy is right. Ray Ramsey is production superintendent, and he likes women in the plant like he likes a breakdown.

Jim Merkle, the inspection foreman, is leading the girl past the Bullards, and I see her shudder when she feels the fine mist of cutting oil against her face. She wipes her forehead with the back of her hand. She does a fancy little side-step when she passes my Fay. The chip man has forgotten to put the splash-guard up, and she gets the oil broadside.

The girl is scared to death, but I can't hold that against her. I have seen men just as scared when they

first walk into a factory. It's the noise, the constant movement, and feeling that things are happening around you and to you that you don't understand.

Jim Merkle, the inspection foreman, is leading the girl past the Bullards, and I see her shudder when she feels the fine mist of cutting oil against her face. She wipes her forehead with the back of her hand. She does a fancy little side-step when she passes my Fay. The chip man has forgotten to put the splash-guard up, and she gets the oil broadside.

Ray Ramsey spots them and saunters over and watches the girl. From the look on his face I figure something is going to be said, so I walk down that way, pretending like I am thirsty, be-

I know without hearing that he is telling her about holding up production on shells.

Mechanic

cause the drinking-fountain is near her bench.

"This is Marie," I hear Jim Merkle say. "Marie, this is Ray Ramsey, superintendent of this department."

Ramsey is a long, tall fellow, with black wavy hair that he keeps cut close to his scalp as though he's ashamed of the waves. His eyebrows are thick and black, and his cheeks have deep lines that make him look like an outdoor man, but really come from ulcers. His face is all up and down lines. And for a man with his job, he is still very young, in his middle thirties.

RAY nods at the girl and says: "You'll get along if you use your head; but remember each one of these shells represents money, so don't reject them unless you are absolutely sure they won't go."

"I'm telling her what's go and no go," says Jim.

"I'm telling her that she wants to be careful," says Ray. He talks quietly, but he says each word slow and plain, so nobody ever makes the mistake of thinking he doesn't mean what he says. "I've seen these hairpin mechanics before. Most of 'em are no damn' good in the shop."

Carl Miller, the painter, comes up to the group. I think I catch some kind of signal between the girl and Carl, but I am not sure. It's just one of those things where people use their eyes.

There is quite a crowd around the little girl now, and what I get is that most of 'em would just as soon she wasn't there. I have at least five people in the space of five minutes tell me that the shop is no place for a woman. The more I hear it the more I find myself taking her part. Then I see Marie looking at Ramsey the way a woman looks at a man when she starts making plans. It has been years since I tried to figure out a woman.

I remember to take a drink, and start walking back to my Fay. Carl breaks away from the gang around the inspection bench and catches up to me. Carl is about medium build and I have never seen him in a dirty

pair of coveralls, which is very strange for a painter, but not for him. He is one of those neat people who can still look as clean and fresh at the quitting whistle as they do when they start in the morning. He never forgets to shave, even on Monday mornings.

"How they going?" I ask him.

"That job of mine has really got me down," he says. "I haven't hit production once since Ray Ramsey put me on it. I'm going batty trying to make out. Ramsey had me in his office this morning."

"That's bad," I say. When Ramsey calls anybody into his office it usually means the business. Not, of course, that he does it very often or without reason.

"I've got the feeling," says Carl, "that I'm letting everybody down. We need those shells, and I'm not getting them. Charley, if I could only get some way to shield that bourrelet besides using masking tape I know I could get production! I know it!"

I'd like to see the kid make out because he has tried.

"What do you think of the girl?" I ask.

"I like her," he says. There is a funny look in his eyes. He is almost laughing at me. "I've liked her ever since I've known her, and I've known her for a long time. She's my sister!" I feel like I've just crawled out of the shrinker that we have on the line for shrinking the brass band on the shells.

When the whistle blows at nine-fifteen for the twelve-minute rest period, I walk over to Marie's bench. I notice a bunch of rejects piled in front of her and they spell *t-r-o-u-b-l-e*.

"I'm Charley," I tell her. "Anything you have any questions about, just ask me and I'll try to answer 'em."

"Thanks," she says. "I'm Marie Miller."

There is a lot of family resemblance, I think, when I look closely at her. She looks so much like Carl that it is a wonder I haven't noticed it before. There is the same openness about their faces that makes them both seem like little kids. Marie is very pretty and there are tiny lines around the corners of her mouth that might be dimples or the beginning of a laugh.

"I know your brother pretty well," I tell her.

"He's spoken of you a lot, Charley. You seem like an old friend to me." This girl has a way about her that makes you feel welcome.

I am a little bit curious about what a babe like her is doing in the shop, so I ask her.

"I want to be doing something to help," she says; "something that will make me feel like I'm doing something important, really useful. I guess it's just a natural desire for a woman to meddle, and I want to meddle where it'll do the most good."

I spend what's left of the rest period explaining to her about things around the shop, from where the shells are forged down to where they are painted a bright yellow on an automatic spray machine just before she gets them to inspect. Her eyes are very wide and she looks like she is drinking in my every word. I feel like a set-up man showing his know-how to a new hire.

"It's so wonderful," she says, "some of these machines work as though they have minds of their own."

"It would be wonderful," I say, "if we were getting out production, but we're not."

MARIE catches on to her job very easily and she is making out within a couple of days. I think she is going to make Ray Ramsey eat that hairpin-mechanic gag of his.

Ray stops at my machine one day and stands there watching me turn out the shells. I pretend like I am working like a dog and do not even see him until I have turned three or four pieces.

"Hello, Ray," I say.

"Hi, Charley, having any more trouble with the hard steel?" he asks.

"No, the tool bits are holding up a lot better," I tell him, but he knows this. He has something else on his mind—a lot, probably, what with this slow production and putting a woman in the department and pressure from the front office.

"That new inspector—what's her name?" He acts puzzled, but I know he knows her name, he just doesn't want me to think he is too interested.

A drama of 1943 America, by Harden de View

"Marie," I say. "Pretty, hey?"
"Yes, she's pretty all right, but I'm going to ask Merkle to take her off the job." He jams his big hands into the pockets of his blue-serge suit-coat.
"How come?" I don't like the sound of this. She'll take it hard, I know.

"She's raising the devil with what little production we're getting," he says. He runs his hand over his bushy hair. "The men resent her being on the job; some of them have threatened to quit."

"Tough," I say.

"On me, too," he says. Without explaining the meaning of this last he leaves me flat-footed. I watch him as he peddles down the aisle, his shoulders slumped a little and his blue suit hanging on him like a burlap bag. It looks to me like his bachelor estate is adding a fireplace to keep the home-fires burning.

RAMSEY doesn't act right away because Marie stays on the job and one day on the rest period I wander down to her bench, and ask her how everything is going.

"Are you married, Charley?" she asks.

"I'm afraid I am going to have to break your little heart," I say. "I am very much married. Thirty years ago come September, Lana found the same irresistible something about me that you do. I have three children."

"Darn it! Lana beat me to it," she says and laughs. The little lines around the corners of her mouth do nip-ups. And then comes what she has been building up to all along.

"Is Mr. Ramsey married?" She looks the other way as though this last question is something she just tosses up to keep the conversation going, but I feel that the wrong answer will hurt.

"Not yet," I say.

"Oh!" And so much feeling in so little a word I have never heard before.

"Charley, why don't the men like me?" Her expression shifted gears without letting the clutch out. Her question caught me off-balance.

"They like you," I say. I can see she doesn't believe me and yet she wants to.

"No, they don't. I heard one of them say that he was going to quit if they were going to turn this plant into a Ladies Aid. All I want, Charley, is to do my job. I'm not asking favors because I'm a woman."

"You just stay in there and pitch," I say.

"But that's not all, Charley. Look!" She points under her bench. "I'm scared. I've had all these rejects with in the last hour."

"There must be twenty-five of 'em there," I say, and I whistle. "What are you knocking them down for?"

"This," she says. She picks up one of the light eighty-one millimeter

smoke bombs and shows me the knurled band that is around the shell just before the nose. "This is the bourrelet," she explains. I know that. "The blueprint calls for this to be unpainted, and look at the paint on it." There is a fine spray of yellow paint on the bourrelet, and she is right in rejecting them, but I am afraid Ray Ramsey will not be as broad-minded as I am about it.

"Have you talked to Carl?"

"Yes, Charley." Her voice is very woebegone. "We've talked about this for hours. He stays awake nights worrying. And I—I'm the one that's rejecting his work. This could cost Carl his job. They—they've told him."

"Sure, kid." Not very helpful but the best I can do under the circumstances.

"He is using masking tape to cover up this band while he sprays the shell, but the tape doesn't always get on straight and he has to get out production. Besides, putting that tape around each shell is slow business."

I seem to have heard this somewhere before. I don't know why people always pick on me to tell their troubles to. It may be my face—I'm as homely as a hedge fence—but for some reason or other I always got to listen no matter how uncomfortable it makes me feel. I am just a walking Court of Goodwill.

I am wishing there is something I can do to help the kids, but there isn't. It looks to me like Carl is going to have to take the rap for something that isn't his baby.

"There's got to be another way to paint those shells," she says viciously.

"Sure. When Ramsey comes down here, just stick to your guns and show him the blueprint."

I am not back at my machine very long when Ray Ramsey comes legging it down the aisle, hellity-clink. Somebody must have got to him and told him what was going on down at the final bench. There is blood in his eye when he passes me. His bushy black hair is standing and waving in the breeze he is making. His baggy pants are flapping around his legs.

He stops short at Marie's bench and starts barking at her. He is waving his arms, which shows that he has really got a mad on, because, generally he can raise all kinds of hell with a guy without ever raising his voice and without saying much. I know without hearing that he is telling her about Pearl Harbor and holding up production on shells.

Marie seems to be taking it. She stands there, her fists clenched and pressed against her small hips, and stares him in the eye. She is talking back to him, but not much.

Ramsey leaves her and beats it over to the paint-booth. His voice bellows so loud from there that the siren on

the overhead crane would come in a bad second for noise. He jumps onto Carl with both feet and both hands and if there'd been a kitchen sink around he'd have thrown that in, too.

Marie is dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief. Something happens to my Sunday throat that makes it hurt. I do not like to see women cry.

I wander down that way.

"What's the trouble?"—as if I didn't know.

"He—he's right, Charley. I'm a hairpin mechanic. I don't belong in a shop. I should never have started." She is sobbing and I want to reach out and put her head on my shoulder, but I figure that will never do. There is more to her crying than just a bawling out. It is kind of a heartsick sobbing. She has troubles, plenty of them, feeling the way she does about Carl and then having this guy Ramsey turn on her like he does. I guess, then, that my shoulder wouldn't do no good, anyway.

"Maybe I'd better quit before he has me fired," she says. "I've failed, Charley. I've failed."

"C'mon, kid," I coax. "You can take it. You're right and Ramsey knows it. And show these boys around here that you've got the moxie. Look, after three-thirty go out and buy a hat or have your hair done, or whatever it is you women do and you'll feel better."

I go back to my machine feeling like a Dutch uncle and a little bit leery, too, for fear Ramsey has seen me playing Dorothy Dix. The fellow working on the machine next to me comes over.

"What'd I tell you," he says. "Women don't belong in no shop. Look at her cry. They ought to pass a law making 'em stay home." I know that the other fellows are feeling a lot the same way.

I feel like punching the guy in the nose but I take it out on the shells instead. I slam them into the Fay and I throw 'em out on the line. I work it out of my system.

THE next morning I see Marie come prancing into the department looking as bright as a new penny. It is hard to figure because if anybody should look sad she should. We have about twelve minutes before the shift changes so I go over and chat with her.

"How do you feel, Marie?" I asked.

"You mean about quitting?" she asks. "Oh, I have forgotten all about that. Charley, I have the most wonderful idea." She is all excited. "But I am going to need your help."

I do not especially like the idea of ideas where my boss is concerned. I have seen these women when they are getting even, and she is fixing to deal one off the bottom to Ramsey or I miss my guess.

"Shoot," I say.

"Well, when I got home yesterday afternoon, I kept thinking about that masking tape and what a poor job it is doing, so I followed your advice and went down and had my hair done."

"Maybe it's me," I say.

"Oh, wait; I know it sounds foolish, but it will work," she says.

"What will? Your finger-wave?"

"That's what gave me the idea."

"What idea?"

"This idea for shielding the bourrelet on the shell," she says. And she starts to explain what she means.



"Carl and I sat up all night talking about it," she says, "and he thinks it will work." The seven-thirty whistle blows and we are supposed to start to work but I stay and talk to her.

"You might have something," I say. "I'll see what I can do."

I keep thinking about her idea all morning; when the whistle blows for the rest period I go to Ramsey's office.

"Ray," I start, "that little inspector on the final bench has got a brain-storm."

"You're telling me, Charley? I've already seen Merkle and he's promised to take her out of here Monday morning, and as for that brother of hers, he's all washed up. I'm giving him his time today."

"Wait a minute, now. Marie's got something that will work on painting them shells. It's a new method of shielding things and I don't know why it won't work."

"Show me." Ramsey pushes a pencil and a scratch pad across the desk at me. He will always listen to a new idea. That's why he's a superintendent. He used to be a machine operator like me, but he had ideas, his own and other people's, and he used them.

"It's like this," I explain. "Here's the bourrelet—" I draw a very shaky picture of a shell and mark off the

bourrelet with heavy lines. "Now she figures if she can get a band of steel just the width of this and just a little bit oversize so it slips on and off easily—"

"And weld it on each shell before you paint," he says sarcastically. I pay no attention; I just go on explaining. When I am through he says:

"What would be better than having a solid band of steel would be to quarter it so that you have four separate sections, each one with a little knob for a handhold for the painter." He gives Marie's idea the finishing touch that it needs.

"You're right," I say. "I was thinking that we would run into trouble with a solid band."

"Go down to the tool-room and have a set made up, Charley," he says. "Take this sketch along with you." And right there, in about five minutes he draws up a good workable sketch

with all the dimensions without referring to the blueprint once.

"You know, Charley," he says, "this job is the hottest thing in the plant right now. The front office has been pushing the devil out of me. We're so far behind schedule that the Government is threatening to cancel their contract. Every time we fail to make a shipment we have to pay a penalty." Ramsey looks a little bit older and a little bit less cocky than usual, but his voice is very low and very calm.

The girl does a fancy side-step when she passes my Fay. The chip-man has forgotten to put the splash-guard up.

I pick up the sketch and start out of his office. "And, Charley," he calls, "don't tell Marie that I know about it."

"Okay, Chief."

I trot down to the tool-room with the boss' sketch of Marie's idea and it don't take me long to get a set made up as I know how the tool-room can hammer on the dog when they want to. I tell them to jerk the lead and I stay right there on their tail until they get it made for me. I run back to see Ramsey.

"Here you are, Boss," I say. I lay down the pieces of metal on his desk in front of him.

"Good, Charley. They are going to be all right, too. Do you know that?" He looks very happy. "Take these down to the painter. I'll be along in a little while. And Charley, just between you and me, I hope it works—for the girl's sake. She's a swell kid and I—well, I don't like to get tough with her."

I leave his office and go down the line. I pass my idle machine and I think: "Boy! Am I going to have to make time, to make out today!"

Marie has the usual pile of rejects in front of her. I hand her the pieces of metal.

"Here you are, Marie."

She looks a little stunned because she hasn't known about the change in the plans and instead of a solid band of steel she now has four pieces that fit together around the shell to make a solid band of protection from the paint. I explain this.

"Oh, Charley," she says, "do you think it will work? Do you?" Her big blue eyes are melting me down and the small crinkles around her mouth have disappeared. She is very serious.

"Sure, they'll work," I say. "Let's try 'em anyway."

WE walk over to Carl. Marie is holding her invention in the palms of her hands. Carl's overalls are as neat and clean as ever and his hair is combed just right, but his face shows all the worry and feeling that he is going through. His forehead is wrinkled and his cheeks are sucked in. He doesn't look like a kid any more.

"Try these, Carl," I say.

"Keep your fingers crossed, Charley," he says.

So much depending on so little! My hands are shaking when I hand him the little pieces of metal.

"We have visitors," says Carl. I turn my head and see Ramsey standing behind me and next to him is a guy I see very little of down in the shop, but he's a very important bird. It is Pete Masters, works manager, no less. Masters is a gray-headed little fellow with a pot belly and a reputation for being a good egg, but I am scared anyway. Brass hats have a way of making me nervous.

"Put 'em on like this." I pick up one of the quarter-circle shaped pieces and fit it snugly over a part of the bourrelet. I put the rest of the small pieces on until they form a solid ring over the part of the shell that should not be painted.

"It's this girl's idea," says Ramsey, and he points to Marie.

Jim Merkle comes gliding over to our little group, his forehead glistening like dew on the outside of a beer glass. His face is lit up like a blast furnace because he figures Ramsey is catching the devil about the rejects. That would really tickle him.

There is quite a crowd gathering. All the machine operators are coming over to look on, and the inspectors and truckers have stopped working so that they can watch.

"What makes those small shields stick on the shell like that?" asks Masters.

dug into his lower lip so hard that I think he is going to strike blood. The spindle revolves and the spray guns let loose with paint from all directions right at the spindle. Then it happens. My stomach does a quick repeat. One of the small arcs of metal slips; the spindles index with a jerky motion, the piece tumbles off the shell. One-quarter of the bourrelet gets a solid dose of paint.

"Well," says Masters, and he makes a funny little motion at the air with his short arms. "I guess that's it. It doesn't work, Ramsey." He gives Ray a very hard look, and the boss looks sick. He has pinned a lot of hopes on the little girl's idea.

Jim Merkle is grinning with every tooth in his head. I glare at him, but old Charley's glare is just a kerosene lamp in an electric age.

Marie looks at Ramsey and then at Carl, and I am afraid she is going to break down and cry again. Her lower lip is quivering and her eyes are beginning to blink. Ramsey's jaw sets and his black eyebrows come together over his nose. Carl's shoulders sag. He reaches out toward his sister, then his hands drop to his sides. I figure that Marie and Carl are very much canned right at the moment.

"Wait a minute, Pete," says Ramsey. "That's good. It works." Masters has started down the aisle, between the machines and Ray runs after him. It is the first time, and I have been at the plant a long time, that I have ever seen Ramsey run for anything or anybody. He catches up with Masters when Pete has to stop for a wheelbarrow of chips blocking the aisle.

Marie watches Ramsey bringing Masters back up to the spray booth. The expression on her face is turning cartwheels and lands on the sunny side with a smile. Her eyes say, "My man!"

"Don't you see," says Ramsey when he collars Masters. "The idea is all right. The other three pieces stayed on because they were magnetized; the one that fell off isn't treated right. If it had been magnetized the same as the other three it would have stayed on, too. Three out of four isn't a bad percentage for a first try."

Masters looks puzzled for a minute, as though he can't make up his mind and Ramsey piles the words on top of one another.

"It's a great idea, Pete. Magnetic shields for painting steel parts. Why, they can be used on everything! It's so simple it's a wonder nobody ever thought of it before."

"The painter should be able to get out production, now," says Masters, cracking a little. "It might work, at that." He picks up a shell and snaps one of the shields in place. "It might, at that."

"It's all the girl's idea," Ramsey says again.

"That's the way it is with the Inspection Department," says Jim Merkle, trying to steal a little of the glory. "We're all working for the plant."

AND now, Mr. Merkle," says Marie, "I am quitting. I'd like to get my clearance as soon as possible."

"What?" yells Ramsey. "What are you talking about?"

"Not so loud, please, Mr. Ramsey," says Marie. "I am glad the idea worked, but I want to get out of here, I don't belong. Factory work is no job for a woman." She starts walking away, trying to act calm and doing a pretty good job of it, but I know she must be feeling shaky inside.

"Mr. Ramsey," says Carl, "if you want to send a time-study man down here I can probably turn out twice as many shells now." Ramsey isn't listening, though; he is looking at Marie.

One of the machine operators in the crowd says, "Well, fellows, I guess if a woman can do it we can. C'mon!" The crowd starts to move away, and I hear all kinds of noises from the men about getting out production. Marie has shown the way.

"Please tell me," says Pete Masters, "how in the world you ever got an idea like that."

"On Charley's advice," Marie says, "I went and had my hair done yester-



*Illustrated by
H. Weston Taylor*

"They're magnetized," I explain. They were. They were machined down so they'd fit snug and then magnetized so they'd stay put.

Carl takes the shell from me and puts it on a spindle in the automatic spray machine. His upper teeth are



day after work. While the girl was working on my hair she started to pull out the hairpins from all the tight little curls they make. Well, she used a little magnetic stick to pick out the hairpins—"

She is looking at Ramsey to see how he takes this last.

Ramsey is taking it like a man. He even grins a little.

"Marie," he says, and he says it very seriously, "don't quit. You can't now.

"What makes those small shields stick on the shell like that?" asks Masters.

You're an asset to the company. In times like these the country needs all the good men it can get, and you're one of 'em." Marie strikes an attitude like it is a very tough bill of goods he is selling her.

"Marie," Ramsey says, "don't quit. I'm asking you. I need you here."

Marie looks at him and smiles.

"The men all want you to stay, too," he continues. The fellows are grinning at her, letting her know that they think she is a regular fellow.

"Mr. Merkle," she says, "I am still all woman. I have changed my mind about that clearance."

I watch Ray and Marie looking at each other and I do not need to go to a beauty shop to get an idea about the magnetic principle.

Flower

AN ADVENTUROUS ROMANCE OF THE
BRAVE OLD DAYS WHEN AMERICA WAS
YOUNG, AND FREEDOM WAS A REALITY
RESET BY FEW COMPLEXITIES.

by FREDERICK
R. BECHDOLT



The Story Thus Far:



SULL WEST was on a scout for antelope when he smelled wood-smoke; and when he crept up to the edge of a cañon and peered over, he saw a Comanche encampment—and close below him a girl with blue eyes and auburn hair.

Back at the hide-hunters' camp, he told his partners Charley Barton and Bermuda that he would be gone a few days, and then rode to see his friend the trader Luis Turango, and asked questions and made arrangements. When the Comanches came to Turango to buy whisky, Sull was disguised as another friendly Mexican; and that night, with Turango taking care of the girl's Indian suitor Pretty Lance, Sull carried her off.

Next day the chief White Wolf came to Turango's camp and the trader bought this girl Prairie Flower for twenty ponies—for which Sull reimbursed him.

"Fellow by the name of Hanrahan came down with us from Dodge," Sull explained to Turango. "His wife's running an eating-house for the teamsters, and she knows three or four Indian languages." His glance became appealing. "It aint that I want to quit on the job, Luis, but she can do it a heap better than me, and she'd be willing. Besides, it won't be very long before we find who this kid belongs to."

"I hope that is true," the *comanchero* told him. "And do not forget that he thinks you bought her for your wife. And," Turango added dryly, "remember that she thinks so too."

Turango was right, for soon after Sull had left Prairie Flower with Mrs. Hanrahan, the girl ran away. Bermuda followed her—but shortly thereafter returned looking as if he'd tangled with a wildcat.

Sull was camped by himself when Prairie Flower walked into the circle of firelight, and announced humbly: "I cam' to yo'."

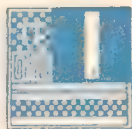
"You listen," he said to her a little later:

"There is a place where the white people make their medicine. We call it the church. When a man wants a woman for his wife, he must take her to that place. They say words there. They must do this before they live together. That is why you do not live with me now. Because we have not made the medicine."

"We will go to this place?" she asked.

"We will go," he said: "I will take you to that place to make our medicine. But before we go, I must finish my hunting and you must wait for me with the women. You must promise to be a good girl."

"I will be good," she said.



It was late in June when Sull and Barton left the little settlement by Bent's Creek, and by the first week in July they were enrolled as civilian scouts with the cavalry which General Miles was using to round up the South-western Indians in the lands of the free grass.

One evening about three months later they were lying beside four troopers in a buffalo wallow on a bare hill between the upper Washita and the north fork of Red River.

The wide hole which the shaggy bulls had gouged out in fly-time was a little more than two feet deep; it was surrounded by a low embankment and its sides were scarred where the six men had dug fresh earth for the rude breast-work with their butcher knives. There were several inches of water in the bottom and it was red; the mud which caked two of the troopers' blouses was stained with blood. It had been a heavy day, even for that summer when tiny garrisons of weather-stained men held down hundreds of such *ex tempore* fortifications in the wild grasslands.

They had met the Indians about ten o'clock in the morning, more than a hundred Cheyennes and Kiowas; the two parties were riding toward the summit of a hill from opposite sides, and so the surprise had been mutual. By good luck the white men had reached the divide first, and, with the advantage of their higher position, had gained time enough to hole up in the wallow. The monotony of the all-day fight that followed had been punctuated by several charges, during which none of the defenders was certain whether he was going to die nicely, or be spared to furnish amusement for an evening scalp-dance. But the last disorderly rush had broken and one of those vicious thunderstorms which sweep the prairies in late summer had swung the wavering balance; the Indians had decided to call it a day.

Just at present the big question was whether any more hostiles were going to happen along before a wagon-train and its cavalry escort passed the spot. The train was on its way from Camp Supply to Fort Sill and was overdue; there was, of course, the likelihood that it was having troubles of its own and might not show up at all.

One of the wounded troopers was moaning dully; the breath of another was coming through an arrow-hole beneath his shoulder. They had tamped a patch of handkerchief into the hole with a willow stick to check the bleeding and the exhalations sounded like a boy blowing soap-bubbles. There were many arrows implanted about the wallow.

"Looks like the back of a porcupine," Charley Barton had remarked, soon after the last Indian disappeared

of the Frontier



around the hill. It was black dark now and it had turned cold; Charley's teeth were chattering so badly that he had not been able to whistle for some time.

Somewhere in the darkness a mule brayed. Sull picked up his buffalo gun and fired three shots; there was a long interval between the reports because his fingers were so numb that he had trouble in handling the big grasshopper cartridges. The silence that followed seemed interminable; then the thin notes of a bugle came faint and far out of the night. Sull said:

"Pears like you boys will be buying dollar-a-bottle beer for the girls next pay-day after all."

"I'm going to save my wages," Charley managed to articulate through the rattling of his teeth. "I'm through with this butterfly life."

It was an hour before the wagon-train arrived, and an hour after that little camp-fires were twinkling along the flat at the foot of the hill; the comfortable sound which horses make when they are munching hay came from the picket line. With a quart of hot coffee and the contents of three mess plates inside of him, Charley was feeling more assertive; it was he who delivered the account of their experience to the lieutenant in command of the detachment. Sull's portion of the recital consisted of a few monosyllables, wrung from him by questions.

"Not that it's any of my business," Charley told him while they were making down their beds under a wagon, "but you are the damndest man I ever saw these last few

months. Long as hell is popping, you are as lively as the end man in a minstrel show. Soon as the trouble's over, you are about as good company as a wet dog on a cold day. I wish I knew what ails you."

It was just as well that he did not expect enlightenment, for he got none, but after they had crept into their robes Sull lay awake a long time, trying to find an answer to the question for himself. Introspection, however, was a novelty with him, and he was further hindered by the fact that he persisted in using the crux of his problem as a point of departure. This business—so he was thinking—of everybody meddling in his affairs was getting tiresome. He was good and sick of it; first Luis Turango, then Mrs. Hanrahan, and now Charley. He was doing the best he could and why on earth dissatisfaction kept riding him was more than he could understand. Having ranged thus around the circle he fetched up where he had begun, and the cause of his troubles kept him company until he fell asleep. Then at last the picture of Flower, as she had stood before him in Mrs. Hanrahan's kitchen, was erased from his mind once more and he ceased to hear her saying, "I will be good." But when he woke the next morning the feeling of meanness still burdened him like a heavy weight. . . .

Two weeks later they drew their pay at Fort Sill. News had just come that the cavalry had wiped out two villages

of Comanches and Kiowas in the cañon Palo Duro: the campaign was as good as finished.

"I'm heading back for Bent's Crick," Charley announced.

Sull said, "I'm riding south." But before they parted he handed over five twenty-dollar gold-pieces.

"Give 'em to Mrs. Hanrahan," he bade the other. "Tell her I'll send more later on. Tell her to do the best she can with that girl, and mebbe I'll find out something about her folks yet."

It was a salve but the surcease which it brought was slight. Time helped somewhat, and there was a good deal happening in the State of Texas in those years of widening ranges. During his wanderings he eased his mind by making a few casual inquiries concerning lost children, and he finally found an anesthetic west of the Nueces.

THE name of the anodyne was Dragoon. The outfit of cow-hunters with whom Sull was working at the time, was tough, even for southwestern Texas in the seventies. Every week or two a pair of rangers rode into their camp with sawed-off shotguns and combed out the more recent recruits. But on the night when Dragoon walked into the circle of firelight where the men were making down their beds, there was some turning of heads and considerable quiet comment, for the newcomer's raiment consisted only of a pair of high-heeled boots and a suit of red flannel underclothes, with a single-action Colt's revolver belted around his hips.

"Call me Dragoon," he said, and they let it go at that, although there was some mild speculation as to whether he had selected the nickname from a mountain range in Arizona or one of those cavalry regiments which the army used to send after Indians before the Civil War. He was a tall young fellow with a shock of blond hair, bright blue eyes, and a disposition to try anything once. Sull fastened to him from the beginning and within a week the two of them were riding into San Antonio, where more enticing adventures than cow-hunting offered themselves to irresponsibles.

The month was May, nearly a year since that evening when Sull had promised Mrs. Hanrahan to return and had obtained Flower's promise to be a good girl while he was gone; the memory of the incident was beginning to fade now. By the first of June he and Dragoon and four others were riding down the old Laredo trail, bound for the State of Chihuahua after wet horses. They called them wet because the intention was to swim them across the Rio Grande but the term was an euphemism. The expedition was carried out along exactly the same lines as the Comanches had used in making their living, and was esteemed legitimate on the old ground that Mexicans didn't count.

By way of further justification there was some sort of a minor revolution brewing at the time. But the revolution went the way of many similar affairs and during a brief spasm of zeal that followed its collapse the local constabulary laid the six Americans by the heels. Two twenty-dollar gold-pieces which Sull had the foresight to hide in the lining of a boot and a sentry with a rapacious inamorata combined to effect an eleventh-hour jail delivery, and the sextette recrossed the Rio Grande considerably the worse for wear, late in July.

On the night after their repatriation Sull and Dragoon were lying on their blankets under some cottonwoods outside Laredo. With life once more an assured fact, the problem of three meals a day confronted them.

"I have been thinking," Dragoon said, "about a fellow by the name of Buckshot Roberts that I ran acrost last year in Arizona. He was on his way to the Pecos Valley and he wanted me to throw in with him. Ever in that part of the country?"

"I was in the upper valley once," Sull told him.

"This place where Roberts was headin' for is below Fort Sumner; it's near the Bosque Grande. There's a cow-man there who's having trouble holding down his range, and he's looking for good warriors."



"I'm here, Bermuda," Sull halted as he spoke. His hands were by his sides. But Bermuda did not stir.

"Sounds like a bet," Sull agreed. They talked it over for some time and when they were about to settle down to sleep, Dragoon pulled a plug of tobacco from his jeans. He whittled off a good-sized chunk and tucked it into his cheek.

"It's been so long since I have had a chew," he murmured, "that I reckon I'll have to learn all over again." He chuckled drowsily. "Like I did when I was a little kid. I mind the day. It was—tumultuous. It was so plumb disrupin' that I wasn't able to pay much attention to one of the neighbors when he rode up to the house that evenin' and told us that the Comanches had wiped out a family in the valley." He crept further down into his blankets and his voice was barely audible. "Killed the man and woman; filled 'em full of arrows. And carried off the girl. I remember her well—just a little thing and red-headed. It was in the Cibolo Valley—years ago. . . . Funny. . . ."

But it wasn't funny, Sull was thinking, how one thing had stuck in his mind. . . . The Cibolo Valley; that was over San Antonio way. And the girl was red-haired. . . .

"I have forgot some business that I promised to look after," he announced, when they were saddling up the next morning.



"Going to quit on me?" Dragoon asked.

Sull shook his head.

"Give me time. I'll make the Pecos before summer's over. What's the name of this party we're looking for?"

"Name of Chisum," Dragoon said. "His brand's a cut dewlap. I'll be there when you come along."

So they parted for the time being, and Sull rode away to get rid of that troublesome memory before he left Texas.

CHAPTER TWELVE



NE evening about two weeks after Sull and his fellow marauders rode back from Mexico, Flower slipped out of the bed where she and Annie were supposed to be fast asleep. It was black dark in the little room and she was lying next the wall, but Annie slumbered as

hard as she worked and Flower slid from under the covers without interrupting the slow droning rhythm which told the world that all was as it should be here. She got into her clothes and glided through the kitchen silently.

The settlement had spread along the benchland but business was quiet just then, and a detachment of cavalry which had ridden in that afternoon hadn't brought a revival, for it was a small outfit and pay-day was still far away. The only lights that showed were two little fires where the squads were bivouacking in the creek bottom. It was a starlit night and the crooked black line of the timber stood out plainly against the skyline, following the course of the stream. Flower stood for some time in the shadow of the sod building's wall, watching the dark forms within the quivering pools of light about the fires. If Sull had seen her then he would have found her greatly changed. A certain set look, impressed by wind and weather and harsh sunlight, which belongs to all barbarians, had been erased, and with the smoothing of her face into lines of greater delicacy, her body had bloomed. Her hair was like dull copper and the light of patience was in her eyes. She had been a good girl. Perhaps her man would not like this thing that she was about to do if he should learn of it; perhaps she was being bad tonight.

She was wearing shoes but if you had been watching while she glided down to the flat you would have sworn

that she was shod in moccasins. She kept well away from the light of the fires and she made no more sound than some small night animal stirring in the grass. She reached the black wall of the cottonwoods and melted into it. For a few moments she remained motionless, then she raised her palm before her lips and uttered a peculiar, quavering cry.

That afternoon she had seen the troopers riding by in dust-stained blue; she had looked upon several bodies of horse soldiers during the past year and this one was smaller than the others, but there were four riders in the rear who did not wear uniforms; their wide black hats and shoddy black trousers were strange to her, for she was unfamiliar with the garb of reservation Indians. There was, however, nothing strange in the constant slapping of their moccasin-heels against the ponies' flanks; it brought a lump into her throat. She waited for an answer to her call.

BY one of the fires a sunburned young lieutenant who badly needed a shave, was lounging.

"What's that?" he said; and a sergeant answered: "Screech-owl, sir. Always hear 'em down in the river bottoms at this time of year." And neither of them noticed that the four Comanche scouts had left camp. The lighted space where the soldiers were sitting wavered like the surface of a pond which is stirred by the wind; it flowed outward and receded with the movement of the flames like disturbed waters, and there were moments when the black wall of the timber was flooded with radiance, but the men did not see the small puddle of light behind that wall.

The scouts were from a band who had ranged along the Clear Fork of the Brazos; they had been drawing rations at the Fort Sill reservation for two years, and had discarded their buffalo robes for government blankets. One of them was standing with arms outspread. He was a tall man for a Comanche, and his reach was wide; the blanket which he was holding hid the glow among the trees. This came from a tiny fire and was just bright enough to show the dark faces of three squatting Indians, to reveal the lines which one of them was tracing in the sand with a stick, and Flower's face, intent on the rude map.

The map-maker drew two long crooked lines from west to east, and in the space between them a short line from north to south. He named the lines in his native tongue, and as she listened to the deep gutturals, she read the map.

The Washita, the North Fork of Red River, and the Wichita Mountains in the land between the streams. He drew another line, parallel with the range to mark Cache Creek and pointed with his stick. He said:

"This is the agency. Your people came here last year. The soldiers destroyed their villages. The chiefs said it was wise to come before the women and children starved."

He was getting on toward middle age, an old man as it was reckoned among the Indians, and his dark face was emotionless, his voice was undisturbed; he told what he had seen as he had seen it and let it go at that. He said:

"The buffalo are gone, and there is no hunting. They try to make their living like the white men now. There is not much to eat. The young men do not like this, and when the grass got strong last spring some of them ran away. The soldiers went out to bring them back and we went with the soldiers to find their trail, but we did not catch them. Some day they will return to the agency to steal women. Then the soldiers will get them. Their leader's heart is bad; he has made them think bad thoughts, because he hates the white men. His name is Pretty Lance."

Flower took that back with her to her bedroom. She had never been as lonely as she was now; she had never wished so hard for her man. If he were here she would not have to lie alone and see the picture of the young renegade whose heart had turned bad; she would not have to think of that other night when she had lain awake awaiting the thin notes of his reed flute, or to wonder what life would

have been like for both of them if he had taken her to his lodge. And above all she would not have to endure the torture of doubt.

She could not recall when the doubt had begun, for it had crept upon her slowly with increasing knowledge. As the days had gone by and the customs of these white people had ceased to be mysteries, she could not help seeing that there was something unusual in Sull's prolonged absence. What he had told her of the white people going to the church and making their medicine was true, but she had learned enough to know that they were just as human in these matters as the Quohadas, and she had learned that sometimes white men abandoned their women. Perhaps he had abandoned her. The thought had occurred before, but she had always been able to rid herself of it at once. Tonight it saddled itself upon her although she fought it as fiercely as if it were a deadly enemy.

"I would give a heap," Mrs. Hanrahan told her husband a few days later, "to know what Flower's thinking about."

"Why don't you ask her?" Hanrahan suggested.

"Yo' are," his wife informed him, "a fool." And when she had plumbed the depths of her vocabulary concerning his thick-headedness, she added, "I shore would love to get my hands on Sull West right now."

She went on to elaborate on her low opinion of the truant in terms of bitter succinctness, and if Hanrahan had been a woman he would have defended his own sex. Being a man and a husband he abandoned the maligned one with utter ignobility.

"Dunno as I blame you. Sull sure left you holding the sack. Think she's grievin' for him?"

"Search me." Mrs. Hanrahan shook her head. "Yo' cain't tell what's in her mind these days. She never says a word about him. But the's a heap of Injun in her although yo'd think, to look at her, that she's as white as me or yo'. She goes on waitin' on table with a wooden face and I have seen enough of Injuns to know that is a bad sign."

She was no fool, and, in the years which lay behind her, she had tasted her share of those joys which are incomplete without unhappiness; she was keeping a sharp eye on this little Flower, and, the chances are, things would have turned out differently than they did if it hadn't been for a complication in their own affairs which gave her husband and herself plenty to think about.

THE two girls had gone to bed a few evenings later and she was setting a crock of sour dough in the warm corner behind the stove, when Hanrahan entered the kitchen. It was too early for closing up and the minute she saw his face, she knew that bad news had brought him here.

"How come?" she managed to keep the panic from her voice. If this had been an Indian raid, he would have broached the tidings at once, but he pulled out a chair and sat down heavily before he answered. She came to him and laid a calloused hand on his shoulder.

"I left Charley Barton tendin' bar." She waited with a patience which was eloquent; this was not the time to put him in his place.

"You mind that feller Bermuda, Lottie? The long-legged one that was partners with Sull West and Charley." It was the first time in five years that he had called her by her first name; her fingers tightened on his shoulder.

"Yes, Bill." She said it without a trace of irritation, as if the name meant something more than mere distaste. Hanrahan rubbed his palm over his jaw.

"Bermuda come back today," he told her. "He's locating here. He's thrown in with Jess Dillon and they're going to start a dance hall in that wooden building that Jess put up last month." He was looking up into her face; he shook his head.

"'Pears like Bermuda made a pretty good stake las' spring, hide-hunting west of Fort Griffin. Did you ever hear of Texas scrip? They gave it to Indian fighters and

it's been swapped around a whole lot. Man that holds it can get public lands for it, some way or another, I dunno just how. Anyhow, Bermuda bought up a bunch of that paper—and traded it in for this six hundred and forty acres that the settlement is on. If any of us had a lick of sense we would have laid hold of a title, but nobody thought of that."

"What's he aim to do now?" she asked.

"He was in the saloon an hour ago," Hanrahan said. "He was licked up before he come. He give it out that anybody that wants to stay has got to do business with him. 'Pears like he killed some feller west of Fort Griffin and he's set himself up as a he-wolf."

Mrs. Hanrahan laughed unpleasantly.

"He-coyote, rather! What's he want for his land?"

"From us," her husband said, "a thousand dollars." And he added drearily, "I might've raised the money if I hadn't bought that new mahogany bar and the pool-table."

"We'll fight him," Mrs. Hanrahan announced. "The's a wagon outfit pullin' out for Dodge in the mornin'. We'll go and get a lawyer—" She smiled at him. "We'll lick that skunk."

It was—and she knew it when she spoke—to be a losing battle, but she was not one of the sort who "take it lying down," and neither was Hanrahan. They left for Dodge City in the morning, and on the day after their departure Annie was so busy with the noontime dishes that Flower was cleaning up the dining-room. The door between it and the saloon had been left ajar. There was an edge on Charley Barton's voice that drew Flower's attention. The long back of the customer who was facing Charley drooped over the bar: it had a familiar look.

"When you see Sull West, Bermuda," Charley was saying, "you can say that to his face."

"Me, I am waiting here to see him," Bermuda replied. "He'll come back some of these days. A man don't leave a neat little piece like that one he stole from the Comanches laying around forever. He'll come and—"

"Listen, Bermuda." There was no good nature in Charley's voice. "You and Sull West and them mules is none of my business. And mebbe you are the big he-wolf here. But I am going to tell you something. Sull took that girl away from the Quohadas to fetch her back to her folks. I reckon you don't understand such things, but that is all there was to it. And if you make another crack like the one you made just now, I'm going to kick you out into the street."

As far as the listener in the dining-room was concerned, the last statement might as well have gone unuttered; she was still thinking of the one which had preceded it, when she waited on the supper-table that evening, and she was facing it when she crept into her bed a few hours later. If she had been cursed by the logic which comes with sophistication, she would have allowed herself to recognize the truth. But she was blessed with the faith which is born of something deeper and more primitive than brittle wisdom, and she kept up the fight which she had been carrying on for the last year.

And two days after that, things began to happen fast.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN



FEW days before Hanrahan and his wife left Bent's Creek for Dodge City, Sull was standing in the office of the Tenth Cavalry Headquarters troop at Fort Sill.

"It don't look like much of a bet," he was saying, "but it's the only one I've got, and I am playing it. There's some folks in the Cibolo Valley who heard the story, but they're newcomers; all the old-timers have moved away or died off. Nobody's left that knows the family's name."

The staff officer nodded; he had listened to a good many stories like this since the army had rounded up the last of



Sull caught his breath. "Why, Sis," he said, "you're pretty as a picture!"

the Comanches. The shoulder-straps on his blue brass-buttoned blouse bore the bars of a first lieutenant, and he wore one of those sweeping mustaches which cavalymen used to cultivate. There was a film of gritty dust on his desk, for the wind was always busy at Fort Sill. The window beside him disclosed a row of stone buildings, a section of the parade-ground where little clouds of dust were maneuvering and a squad of Negro troopers policing the street before the officers' quarters.

Not a Texas man—so the lieutenant was thinking. And the girl was no relative of his. He had banged around a lot for a young fellow, too.

Sull said, "She don't mean anything to me, only she's a white girl. I bought her from the buck that carried her off, and she's been sort of on my mind ever since."

The Lieutenant's thoughts became unruly and strayed away into the East. It was, he reflected, remarkable, the difference that geography made with people. He wondered how many of those whom he had known in that other, more punctilious existence would understand the statement which he had just heard. His thoughts returned to the dusty, windblown land where he was doing business for Uncle Sam. He tugged at one end of his big mustache.

"It's happened before," he said. "We had a girl last year; the Quohadas turned her in. Sixteen years old, carrying a baby on her back, and nobody knows where she came from yet. You see, that bunch that used to handle the Agency were so busy trying to save the Indians' souls that they hadn't time to bother about listing missing children when reports came in." He fiddled with his mustache again.



"This buck you bought her from might remember where he got her."

"Funny I never thought of that," Sull murmured.

"The Quohada village is a few miles up Cache Creek," the Lieutenant said. "You'd have to stick around a while. A herd of buffalo showed up west of the Wichitas last week and the band is out on a meat hunt."

"I'll wait," Sull told him. "Much obliged."

Now that he had allowed himself to think of her, it was remarkable how Flower tugged at him; it was as if he knew that she was needing him. And the rebellion at this return of responsibility made him hot to get this errand behind him; then he could ride away, freed from that irksome feeling that he hadn't done the best he could by her. But the Comanches were making the most of their last big meat hunt and there are a good many pleasanter places for an active young fellow to idle away his time than an Indian Agency. By the time he had dallied for a week the lure of a new idea had seized upon him.

"If she was the kid in the Cibolo Valley, she might have been old enough to remember what the place looked like."

It was funny—so he was thinking on the morning when he saddled up and rode away from Fort Sill—how much better he felt now.

"This," he told himself, "is going to settle it."

THE settlement by Bent's Creek had been growing since he had last seen it. It was as ungainly as a raw boy who finds his sleeves too short and his wrists too long; and, like a boy who is sprouting toward adolescence, it betrayed symptoms of self-consciousness. Not least among these was the glaring wooden building which housed Jess Dillon's new dance-hall. It stood at the upper end of the street and its false front was adorned by one of those large signs whose humor, though it might be stale, never lost its appeal during the years before alfalfa fields replaced the prairie-dog towns. It read:

FIRST CHANCE DANCE HALL LAST CHANCE

Sull took his time inspecting this and other evidences of civic progress while he was unsaddling and stowing away

his traps in the corral behind Myers & Leonard's store. So when he entered Hanrahan's front door he was prepared for the luxury of a mahogany bar, backed by a mirror on which a waterfall, two prong-horned antelope, and a verdant forest had been painted. But the sight of Charley Barton behind the bar in a white apron took his breath. "So it's come to this!" he said.

SAVE for themselves and for one other, the place was deserted; but this other one was in the restaurant—she had started to open the door when she heard Sull's voice; she was unseen by the men as she stood there.

"Bermuda's here," Charley said.

"Time for Bermuda later," Sull replied serenely. "Do I buy first or will you loosen up?"

Charley's hand went beneath the bar and brought forth a bottle with glasses; the movement was in the nature of a reflex; his features were unlighted by the joy of hospitality.

"Bermuda," he announced, "has been here for two weeks, and the' aint a day gone by when he hasn't give it out cold that when you show up, he's going to fill your hide full of holes. He says this town aint big enough for him and you."

"He is correct." Sull filled the little glass, and started to lift it, then he set it down again.

"Since then two teamsters that the Injuns killed, the mornin' of the raid," Charley persisted, "we aint buried anybody here. Me, I would not mind starting with Bermuda. But if you hang around long enough for him to hear the news, he'll go into ambush and you'll be furnishing the funeral."

Sull shrugged. "What's he doing here?"

Charley saw the face across the counter harden as he told the story. His hearer remained silent for a few moments, fingering the full glass, then shoved the glass away from him. There was a queer light in his eyes.

"Any idea how much he paid for that scrip?" he asked.

"That," Charley said, "is what he's been bragging about. Four bits an acre. He 'pears to think it was a smart thing to do."

Sull nodded.

"That's the way he'd look at it. You don't happen to have any cash, do you?"

"I have salted down pretty nigh six hundred dollars," Charley said. "It's in Myers & Leonard's safe."

"If you'll step down to the store and fetch me three hundred and twenty dollars," Sull told him, "I'll pay you back one of these days."

"You are," Charley announced, "as welcome as the flowers in May. But I don't see—"

"I'll hold down the place while you're gone," Sull interrupted.

Those were the days of gold money and when Charley returned ten minutes later he was carrying a little canvas sack which chinked dully as he shoved it across the bar to his friend.

"I'd admire to see this play, whatever it's going to be," he suggested.

"And I'd like you to," Sull answered, "but only for a witness—unless some of Bermuda's friends would try to cramp my style."

"Me," Charley promised, "I'll mind my own business and see that other folks mind theirs."

They departed forthwith, and Flower closed the door which she had been holding ajar. She went back into the dining-room and sat down. She had not heard all that was said for the two men had been talking quietly, but she had heard enough to make her proud and happy.

Entering the long bare room, you found the bar on your left and, in the rear, two of those round, green cloth covered tables which adorned every drinking-place in the lands of the free grass during the years when most men were willing to take a chance. Bermuda was sitting behind one of them and Billy Young, who had been shoeing

mules and mending wagons ever since the hide-hunters had founded the settlement, was standing before it. His bleak regard rested on several folded papers which kept company with a pen and an ink-bottle in the space customarily devoted to the laying down of poker hands.

"Legal," Bermuda murmured as he picked up one of the papers; it was enclosed by a blue folder; he slapped it down on the table. "This here's my patent." He tapped the others. "I done hired a lawyer in Mobeetie to fix up these deeds."

The blacksmith's regard left the documents.

"And if I don't fork over five hundred dollars for that patch of land my shop is on, what do yo' aim to do?"

The room was very quiet. The peculiar sour odor which fresh pine boards give off in hot weather had become a heavy presence; the only sounds were slight stirrings as the members of the little audience shifted their positions, the better to hear. There were five of them, by-products of that brief, medieval era which preceded the proper functioning of the statutes in most of the raw young towns between the Yellowstone and the Rio Grande—a period when might spelled right and mean souls sometimes attained enduring fame.

Jess Dillon was standing near the front door with one foot on the bar rail and his elbows on the mahogany counter. In the days when the early trail herds were driving to Coffeyville some cowboy with a poetic gift had christened him Kettle Belly, and the name had stuck until a town marshal exiled him from that budding metropolis. A fold of his pink shirt was draped over his waistband; garters of baby blue adorned his sleeves. The lank bartender with whom he had been chatting was still an unsavory memory in construction-camps along the Santa Fe. Fort Griffin's citizens had only recently departed from the good old policy of *laissez-faire* in a brief outburst which sent forth the sallow-faced, soft-fingered three now seated around the other poker-table in the rear of the room. An oddly assorted quintet, but all of them belonged to the same breed. The dusty old-timers called its members "tin horns"; in a day whose dawn was then approaching, the riders on the new ranges dubbed many of them barroom gladiators, and in this later day, posterity sees some of them pictured under the glamorous title of two-gun men.

"If yo' don't buy, the boys will put yo' off the place." Bermuda raised his hand in an inclusive gesture, and added, "My posse."

The blacksmith used strong language in a voice which was vibrant with a sense of outrage.

"Plumb legal," Bermuda pulled back his coat and displayed a nickel-plated star. "Sheriff deptytized me in Mobeetie when the county was organized las' spring, and Jess Dillon's jestice of the peace." His voice hardened. "Don't kick ag'in' the pricks."

AS Bill Young ran his fingers through his hair, one of the gamblers at the other table laughed softly, and Bermuda was licking his lips as if the taste of the scriptures pleased him when Sull came in with Charley Barton at his heels. The latter halted near the front door, and Bermuda's thin nostrils dilated; he was breathing harder, and his eyelids curtained his eyes until only two slits remained to watch Sull's unhurried advance toward him.

"I'm here, Bermuda." Sull halted as he spoke. "Commence." His hands were by his sides, and there was no tenseness in his attitude; but Bermuda did not stir.

"I'm waiting for you." Sull's voice was patient. "I will wait till you get your gun above the table."

Someone was moving in the front of the room; one of the gamblers at the other table started to drop his hand toward his thigh, and Charley Barton said:

"Stiddy all. This here aint our tea-party."

Bermuda's hand slid beneath the table and another moment passed before Sull spoke again.



The little boy bolted through the brush as Flower and Pretty Lance confronted each other.

"You can fight standing up if it would suit you better." He lifted his hands well away from his sides and Bermuda's right arm twitched, then it became still. He passed his tongue between his lips.

"I aint looking for trouble with yo'." His voice was husky.

Bill Young expressed his opinion of this reply in one unprintable syllable, and Charley Barton laughed.

"I reckon," Sull went on, "when you said you were going to kill me, you figured to do it from behind. That would be your style. You are—" He specified at length, and when his insults had attained a climax whose incisiveness left a bad taste in his mouth, he shrugged his shoulders.

"If that don't work," he added, "mebbe this will suit you—" And with that he turned on his heel, he walked slowly toward the door.

Seven pairs of eyes were fixed on Bermuda, and as he sat there, conscious of their hard regard, his eyes remained intent on Sull's back. There was a tight expectancy in the faces of the small audience. This was the showdown and its outcome rested with the man whom they were watching; just what would follow, if he chose to act, remained to be seen; but in the mind of everyone a conviction was dawning as to what his decision was going to be. The only sounds in the room were Bermuda's thick breathing and the slow thump of Sull's heels on the board floor. The faces of the watchers began to assume a common expression as the moments passed and conviction resolved to certainty.

Sull reached the door; he turned and came back to the table. Bermuda had not moved; a film of moisture glistened on his forehead.

"Been doing business with him, Bill?" Sull asked.

The blacksmith spat expressively before replying:

"He done said we got to buy our land from him or else he'll throw us out. Hanrahan's going to law him; rest of the boys is sitting tight. I was the first to come."

Sull picked a paper from the table.

"Aiming to buy?"

"Not now," the blacksmith said.

Sull dropped the deed.

"You're through," he told Bermuda. "It was a worse bet than those mules, but this time, *I'm buying you out*. Copy one of those deeds on the back of that patent, and fill in my name."

There was a little silence before Bermuda spoke:

"How much?"

"Same as you paid," Sull said. "Half a dollar an acre."

Bermuda shook his head. "Sell or fight," Sull bade him. "And take your choice right now."

Jess Dillon was swearing under his breath. Bermuda's right hand appeared above the table for the first time. It was empty. He reached slowly for the pen.

"Reckon it's legal?" Charley Barton asked while they were on their way to Hanrahan's a few minutes later.

"Looks like it was," Sull replied serenely, "with your name and Jess Dillon's for witnesses. Anyhow, what's the difference? Bermuda won't come back."

"Bill Young is gathering the boys to see that he pulls out inside of an hour." Charley's voice had a speculative note. "But this will set hard with him. He'll come back some day, and when he does—"

"I dunno why it is," Sull interrupted, "I've never killed a man—only an Injun or two—but I wanted to this afternoon."

"You sure gave him a nice chance to put a slug into your back," Charley remarked, and Sull laughed.

"That's an old trick. Fellow by the name of Dragoon told me about it last spring. If folks are lined up right, it works out nice—and you have one of those open faces, Charley; all I had to do was keep my eyes on you. It was just as if I'd been watching Bermuda in the back bar mirror. Well, now that's 'tended to, I'm going to have a talk with Flower."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN



ULL had spoken the truth when he told Charley of the desire which had possessed him, but was conscious of deep satisfaction when he opened the door which led into the dining-room. This business of killing a fellow-being had suddenly lost its appeal—and, now that the affair was over, he realized he had been living with the unpleasant possibility for a long time. There was a consistency in Bermuda's attitude of Safety First which left a memory like a bad smell, but he was thankful for it. He had been holding himself very tightly during those few minutes in Jess Dillon's "Last Chance," and the inevitable reaction brought a distaste for the horn of the dilemma which he had managed to avoid.

Then he saw Flower. There was a single long table in Mrs. Hanrahan's dining-room; it was covered with green oilcloth and set with heavy china for the evening meal. She was standing at its head and her eyes, on him, were wide with expectancy; her name had never fitted her as well as it did then. He caught his breath.

She was standing in the same attitude that she had held that evening more than a year ago when he had left her in Mrs. Hanrahan's kitchen. For some reason or other it had never occurred to him that time would change her in the slightest; he had expected to see a budding girl, but he was looking at a rich blossom.

"Why, Sis," he said, "you're pretty as a picture!"—and was taken aback at the sound of his own words.

She remained as she was, and if he had only known that this was because she couldn't have moved if she had wanted to, if he had suspected the emotions which had been surging within that pretty little body during the past fourteen months, and the happiness which his words had wrought, perhaps things would have turned out dif-

ferently than they did. She flushed and her eyes were luminous; her voice was soft.

"Did you kill him?"

As far as the real import of the question was concerned, she might as well have asked it in the language of the Quohadas; he exclaimed:

"How did you know?"

She said: "I heard you talking to Charley. So I waited."

He never dreamed what the waiting had been like, or of the struggle it had cost to sit in patience as a woman should while her warrior goes about his deadly business. He answered:

"No, I didn't kill him," and saw the change that came into her face. He was thinking: "She's got a lot of Injun in her yet." Perhaps if he had given the matter more consideration, he would have remembered the code which had been instilled into her, but it would have needed greater skill than he owned to explain that his heart had not turned soft like a woman's when he had faced Bermuda. He shrugged his shoulders; it was funny how such a pretty little thing could be so savage. There came to him a sudden desire to lay hold of her and kiss her. Because of this, his voice turned gruff.

"I've got something I'd like to ask you." He sat down as he was speaking and pointed to a chair across the table. She took it in silence. He had failed to slay this man who needed killing and he wasn't ashamed. The bottom was dropping out of her world!

"Ever hear of the Cibolo Valley?"

She shook her head.

"Low hills," he said. "Little patches of mesquite on the flat and a crick with willows. There was a log cabin. Hewn logs."

Something in the last words brought pain into her eyes, but the pain was not due to the vague memories which he had awakened. She shook her head again.

"I do not remember. Why do you ask me?" She knew the answer to that; she had known it ever since the afternoon when she overheard Charley Barton talking to Bermuda, and now she had to give up fighting against the truth. The color had drained from her face; she was breathing quickly like a hurt animal. And he went on, serenely ignorant of the pain which he was bringing:

"I have been looking for your folks."

The bottom had dropped out now; her world was gone. She started to rise and it seemed to her as if she would never be able to get to her feet; it seemed as if an hour went by between the time when he made that announcement and her reply. She heard herself saying:

"My folks. My folks are at the Fort Sill Agency." Then she walked away.

He was so engrossed in his project that he did not notice the deadness of her voice. He was thinking that he had finished. She couldn't remember anything; the quest was unsuccessful. But that didn't matter now. He recalled the night she had sat beside him in the little opening among the trees, and he had told her how the white people went to church to make their medicine. Supposing he had taken her with him then as she had asked? It was a pleasant idea and he dismissed it with reluctance. Right, he told himself, is right. But there wasn't any reason why he shouldn't marry her some day—that is, provided she would still be willing.

He had forgotten Dragoon and the Pecos Valley; he wasn't going to run away from her again. He was going to stay right here, and maybe—

It was his first experience with the idea of courtship, and it left him in a sort of golden daze during the remainder of the afternoon. When Annie rang the dinner-bell that evening he filed into the dining-room along with the regular boarders; he took his place between Bill Young and a teamster who had just pulled in from Dodge, and the effluvia of sweaty horses which immediately enwrapped him might have been attar of roses so far as he was con-

cerned. The settlement by Bent's Creek had an appeal which no other camp had ever held for him. It was, he was thinking, about time that he quit knocking around. He watched the kitchen door for Flower, and when Annie appeared with her arms full of laden dishes, his heart slowed down.

Annie's large face held a secretive look, and her eyes avoided his on those occasions when she came near him. After the meal was over he waited until the others had departed and followed her into the kitchen where she was busy washing dishes.

"Where's Flower?" he demanded. She did not answer; he took a step toward her and repeated the question. Then she turned and her eyes were hard as they met his.

"She's laying down," she snapped, and added breathlessly: "You wait till Mrs. Hanrahan comes back. Just wait!"

He stared at her for a moment; there was something here that he didn't understand. She turned back to her dishes and he left the room, a little puzzled but still serene. Hanrahan's place did a good business that evening and the universal relief which Bermuda's departure had wrought vented itself in the usual manner. It was getting on toward midnight when Sull made down his bed in Myers & Leonard's corral. The sun was an hour high the next morning when he was awakened by a hand on his shoulder. He looked up into Charley Barton's face, and reading disaster there, was starting to rise before Charley announced his tidings.

"Flower's gone." She left word with Annie that she's heading for Fort Sill; she said she's going to her people and there aint no need for anybody to go after her, because she won't come back."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN



HERE had been a thunderstorm with spates of hail in the morning and as the afternoon was drawing on toward evening a raw wind swept the summits of the three hills which form a landmark just west of the old Fort Sill Agency. The Indians called them the Medicine Bluffs for they believed that the neighborhood was the abiding-place of spirits, and the creek which widened into deep pools beneath their sheer breaks was gloomy enough to justify such superstitions. When Flower rode down to the ford she passed into deep shadows, but when she came to midstream a shaft of pallid sunshine touched her hair and it shone like burnished copper. She looked around; there was no one in sight, but an uneasy feeling that someone was watching her persisted until she reached the northern bank.

The feeling was natural, for she was weary from four days' riding and three nights' sleeping-out unsheltered; her heart was sore; and the silent shadows were sufficient to bring forebodings to a cheerful soul. The presence of the unseen watcher was mere coincidence.

He was lying at the break of the eastern bluff. The beauty of barbaric youth which she remembered from the time when he had played love-songs on a reed flute was gone. He was a travesty on savagery now. The raw breeze stirred his leggings; they had been fashioned from a pair of shoddy black breeches; his calico shirt fluttered about his bare loins. His lank black hair was a defilement and ugly little red flecks were dancing in his eyes.

The Wichita Mountains rose against the western sky off to his left, and a dark streak of timber on their flanks betrayed the cañon where his companions were hiding. On his right, two miles or so away, the buildings of the Fort Sill Agency and the old cavalry post were bathed in cold sunlight. The hill rose gently behind him from the south to the crest where he was lying, and broke before him in a sheer cliff to the creek. The trail which came

to the ford was so close at his right hand that he could almost have tossed a pebble down into it.

It was not safe for him to be in this place because the Indian police and the Negro troopers were keeping a sharp lookout against the members of his renegade band. That was the reason why he was lying on his belly in a thicket of wild plum bushes, watching the trail which led to the Comanche villages, while he waited for the darkness which was necessary for his errand. Then he saw Flower.

He had no idea who she was, but there was something in the look of the doeskin dress which stirred old memories. During these past few weeks, while they had been hiding in the rugged Wichitas, several of his companions had slipped down into the villages near the Agency to get themselves women, as the renegades of old Rome had gotten theirs from the Sabines. His lust had found outlet in murder and bad whisky, until the moment when the sun touched her hair. Then forgotten desires were reawakened. His pony was tethered near by, and if it had not been for a group of Indians who were working over a mired wagon a few hundred yards beyond the crossing, he would have ridden after her. But he dared not risk showing himself, and so he settled down to wait. She was on her way to the Comanche villages; he would be able to learn more about her tonight.

The rolling uplands north of the ford were pocked by old buffalo-wallows, and the morning's thunderstorm had left puddles of muddy water in them; the mud was deep where the road crossed the low swales, and the wagon which Pretty Lance had noticed was bogged down so thoroughly that the walleyed ponies had balked after a few minutes' violent seesawing. It was a Cheyenne outfit, and the owner had summoned a dozen of his tribe from a near-by village.

They had unhooked the animals, and when Flower rode up, they were strung out along a rawhide reata which they had fastened to the wagon-tongue. They were heaving against the weight of the loaded vehicle with the enthusiasm of a tug-of-war team at a Fourth of July picnic. The rope parted just as the girl was passing, and the one-time warriors shot backward into a huge wallow, brim full of yellow water. There was a mighty splash; it was followed by several moments of wild confusion, after which twelve dripping forms emerged slowly one by one. They stood about the wallow, a circle of drenched scarecrows. Then they began laughing.

Their mirth was uproarious; it followed Flower up the dirt road, the laughter of men who had painted their bodies in silent rituals and gone forth to war against white invaders. Now they were wearing the White Man's cast-off clothes while they tried with pathetic inadaptability to make the best of a civilization which they did not want.

She had been keeping away from the trails, avoiding sight of human beings, until this afternoon. It was the first glimpse that she had had of those whom she regarded as her people, and as she rode on, it began to dawn upon her that perhaps the home-coming was not going to be what she had expected.

It was evening when she saw the Quohada village. It lay in a shallow valley where a clear stream wound among huge post oaks. Little spirals of smoke were twining from the tepees; the dark wisps stood out against a broad streak of orange which topped the ragged Wichita range. The cold breeze carried the tang of the camp-fires to her; she looked upon the buff hide coverings with stains of soot where the lodge poles thrust forth from vent-holes. A band of ponies was grazing across the creek and several little boys were shooting at prairie-dogs near by with bows and arrows. Her heart leaped to a surge of precious memories.

But as she drew nearer it seemed to her that the village lacked its old-time life. Except for a clamorous band of dogs which rushed out to meet her, there was no move-

ment in the street before the double row of lodges. And when she rode before them she noticed how old the hide coverings had grown, how some of them were patched with canvas and how the triangular flap which screened the entrance of one lodge had been reinforced by a dilapidated wooden door. She recalled what the Comanche scout had told her. . . .

"The buffalo are gone, and there is no hunting. They try to make a living like the White Man now, and there is not much to eat." She was contrasting these evidences of poverty with the harsh wild life that she had loved, when she saw a familiar figure emerging from one of the tents. It was the strapping young matron who had swelled her pride and aroused the laughter of the other women by the unvarnished catalogue of Pretty Lance's qualifications for wedlock on an afternoon which seemed a long, long time ago. She caught sight of the girl, and her big gash of a mouth expanded; her eyes lighted up.

"It is the little Prairie Flower!" Her voice was filled with joy, and Flower's voice was shaking with happiness as she answered the greeting:

"Wood Duck! My heart is glad."

It was the first time she had reverted to the good old way of talking since that night when Sull had snatched her from her bed, and the sound of the words was pleasant to her ears; but while she was speaking she saw the coarse face change. The welcome had faded from Wood Duck's eyes.

"Do not talk," she muttered. "I will take you to your mother."

Flower slid from the pony's back. She was tired and the raw breeze was seeping through the doeskin dress. There was something depressing in the silence of the village, and there was fear in the older woman's face. Wood Duck snatched the lead-rope from her hand.

"I will take the pony to the herd," she said. "No one will know that you have come."

THE village was arranged in the old manner: two rows of lodges, and the one where White Wolf's women and children slept was behind his own. While they hurried toward it, Flower noticed that the earth was beaten bare about the tepees, the usual litter of brass camp kettles and rawhide panniers was spoiled by tin cans and bits of broken harness; a broken-down wagon stood in the middle of the street with a rusty plow lying beside it. The days of shifting camps were gone; dust had replaced the bruised grass, and disorder which had been cleanly in other days, was tinged with sordidness. These things she could understand, but she was conscious of a presence which bewildered her. It was as if fear had come here with her.

Wood Duck was leading the way. She strode along in silence, and when she reached the tepee of White Wolf's women she looked over her shoulder uneasily. Excepting for themselves and several inquisitive dogs the street was empty. She jerked the entrance flap aside and seized Flower by the shoulder.

"Quick now," she whispered, and thrust the girl within.

A tiny fire was blazing in the center of the lodge. The air was dimmed by smoke, a baby was whimpering somewhere in the shadows, and vague forms of women showed through the fumes. One of the forms was coming toward Flower—it was her foster mother; she seemed to have become much older; the lines on her face were deeper. The voice of Wood Duck came from outside:

"No one has seen her. I will take the pony away and I will not talk."

Flower caught the light of recognition in her foster mother's face and saw the shadow of fear extinguish it as soon as it appeared. . . .

The fire had died two hours ago; the smell of stale smoke remained in the darkness, mingling with the odors of hides and the meat kettle. During the months of her

exile Flower had longed for this peculiar reek, but now her eyes were smarting, her senses were rebelling against its presence.

The breathing of sleepers was all around her and the patient murmur of her foster mother's voice was the only other sound.

"You are happy, my daughter?"

"I am happy," Flower whispered.

"Your man is good?"

And the girl answered swiftly: "He is good."

They were sitting on Flower's bed. It was in the old place with two pallets between it and the entrance of the lodge, and the big gray lice were in the robes as they had been in the days before she went away. There had been times when the memory of their presence had sharpened her homesickness, like the memories of other discomforts which were a portion of barbaric life. Now her flesh revolted at their touch.

Her foster mother sat beside her; on the other side, a little boy, a six-year-old; he was one of the children whose eyes Sull had seen that night of her abduction. He kept stroking her head, and because her heart went out to him she managed to endure the small hands and did not flinch when she felt things creeping into her hair.

She remembered how it used to be when she lay on these same robes, awakening from a dream of light that came through the cracks of a garret floor, of the humming of a spinning-wheel in a room beneath her. It had seemed good, then, to be back here where she belonged. Now she was back again and it was not good. And the change was not due to the poverty which had come during her absence; the things which now repelled her had been a part of the life which she had loved.

She had been awaiting this talk with her foster mother ever since Wood Duck had shoved her into the lodge. She had been watching the three squaws in silence and she had not missed the fear which came into their faces whenever they glanced at her; she had heard the sharp warnings they gave whenever the children asked questions. They were her people and she knew their ways, so she had not asked them why they looked askance at her, or why they did not take her to her foster father. And while she had bided the opportunity to learn the meaning of this fear, she had realized the gulf which had come between them.

She was hating the fastidiousness which made her an alien among those whom she loved. And the knowledge that she was different made her answer her foster mother's question with a lie. She had come here seeking comfort and she could not ask for it; there was no one here to share her heartbreak.

She said, "The times have changed. The village is not like it was."

"We are poor now," her foster mother murmured. "And trouble comes."

"I have seen it in your face," Flower told her, "and in the faces of the other women." The question which she had been waiting to ask was on the tip of her tongue then, but she had a feeling that she must bide a little longer before she put it. Trouble was here and they had not taken her to her father. It was a grave subject and her people—she told herself stubbornly that they were still hers—always approached such matters indirectly. So she said:

"My father is well?" And her foster mother sighed as she answered:

"He is well, but the trouble has come to his people and he must help them. It is hard to do this."

She passed her arm behind Flower's back and touched the little boy on the shoulder. She said:

"You will go to bed now." He started to remonstrate. "Go," she bade him. His small arms slid about Flower's neck and the girl kissed him; he slipped away into the darkness. And the older woman went on slowly:



Pretty Lance was heading toward the mountains, racing on the back-track; the little horse was lining out on a dead run.

*Illustrated by
Herbert Morton Stoops*

"It is hard for us to live like the white men. The chiefs try to teach the people the new way. But the people do not understand these things. And some of the young men will not do what they are told. Their hearts are bad."

"I have heard of this," Flower said. "I have heard of Pretty Lance and the ones who went away with him."

"The white men tell the chiefs that they must capture Pretty Lance," her foster mother said. "They gave the chiefs metal stars to wear and told them that they must catch him and his young men if they come to the village."

"They come every night. They steal young women, and they talk to the young men; they bring whisky with them and the young men drink. Some of them go away. The chiefs try to stop this but they cannot do it, and the white men will punish the people. It is like the days when we came to this place last year. It was very bad then because the white men said that the Comanches must give up all their captives. There were many who did not want to lose these children, and it took a long time for your father and the other chiefs to find them. Some of the soldiers said they were trying to help the people conceal these children."

They were silent for some moments. Then Flower said: "When you see my father in the morning, do not tell him I was here."

She threw her arms around her foster mother, and they kissed each other; then the older woman went to her bed. The only sound in the tepee now was the slow deep breathing of the sleepers.

The hours slipped by, and Flower lay, as she had lain that other night; but the long thoughts which kept her

company now were not of the future. She had come here seeking her people and the life that she had loved. But the old life was not for her, and her presence was a danger to the ones whom she had sought for comfort.

She had always thought of them as her own and now she knew that she no longer belonged to them. She understood the fear which she had seen in their faces, the dread of blame which would come to them if the authorities found a former captive among them.

It was strange to be lying here, just as she had been on that night when Pretty Lance was to come and take her to the marriage-bed. They had been eager for their future then. And now there was no future for either of them. His heart was bad, her heart was broken. They were dangers to the village.

She was waiting for the first light of the dawn. She was going to slip away as soon as it came. That was as far ahead as she could think. She did not know where she was going.

WEARINESS of body tricked her, and she fell asleep. When she opened her eyes, a thin strip of sunlight was creeping beneath the hide covering of the lodge. But the others were still slumbering. She crept to the pallets where the children lay, and she laid her fingers lightly on the forehead of the little boy whom she had kissed good night. His eyes opened and looked up into hers; she whispered:

"Come with me."

It was broad daylight when they went outside, but the street was empty; there were no smoke-wreaths coming from the lodges; even the dogs were fast asleep. In other

years the village would have been seething with small activities, but there was nothing to wake for now. The boy's eyes were wide with wonderment; he stood before her, a ragged little figure, unkempt and dirty. She said: "You will show me where the horses are pastured and help me catch my pony?"

He nodded and started on ahead of her. She followed him through the scattered post oaks and they reached a fringe of willows by the creek. The bushes parted—and the boy cried out in alarm; he whipped around and ran past her toward the village. She stood stock still. The grotesque vision which confronted her was real. It did not seem possible, but it was true. This ragged travesty of barbarism with murder in his eyes was Pretty Lance.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN



THE little boy had bolted through the brush like a scared rabbit and disappeared among the oaks beyond. The only sound that his bare feet made in the dry grass was a faint hissing as the thicket hid him completely from the open space where Flower and Pretty Lance confronted each other.

The renegade's calico shirt was stained with mud; one of its sleeves was in tatters; his hat was gone and his tangled hair was matted with blood, there was an ugly smear of dried blood along one cheek. A cartridge-studded belt sagged across his hips and he was holding a repeating rifle before his chest. He had started to throw its butt to his shoulder when he heard the outcry; he was standing with his arms crooked in this attitude of suspended motion, listening. But the slight whisper of the little boy's feet in the dry grass was inaudible here, and his eyes went to Flower.

It was less than a year and a half since the last time that she had seen him. There was no beauty in him now; the cleanliness of barbarism was gone; the lips which had formed love-notes on a reed flute were loose and cruel. But she barely noticed the transformation from a slender bronze-limbed youth into this poisonous creature; the rags and mud and blood hardly impressed her. She had been prepared for such things by the story which the Comanche scouts had told her, and she was only vaguely conscious of them because she was appalled by what she saw in his eyes. They were like two black pools, and there were little red flecks swimming in their depths. If she had known some of the things which had been going on last night, while she was sitting in the lodge of White Wolf's women talking with her foster mother, she would have understood the reason why those tiny specks of crimson light that spelled murder had appeared the moment that he recognized her.

It was long after dark when he slipped away from the Medicine Bluffs and rode across the ford where he had seen her. The project which brought him here was a large one: he had taken his band to the Wichita mountains and held them there, for days, almost within sight of the military post, in order to carry it out. If it proved successful he would cease to be a ragged renegade and would become a big war chief.

The rendezvous to which he was riding lay in the rolling country, a few miles west of the Quohada village, where broken hills began to rise toward the mountains. There were twenty young men awaiting him there. He had met them before, in groups of two and three; he had inflamed them with stories of rapine and murder which he and his band had committed; he had played on the discontent born of hunger and the strange ways of life into which they had been transplanted; he had reminded them of the harsh punishments which had been imposed upon them whenever they had tried to live as their fathers had before them, and how their chiefs had de-

livered them to the authorities. Those chiefs were old men, their hearts had grown soft and they were afraid. This was the sort of poison which he had instilled and it had festered within the listeners until they, too, were ripe for rape and murder.

So he was riding up the road with the consummation of high hopes before him, and with the knowledge that the chiefs whom he had ridiculed were keeping a sharp lookout for him. He was like the old Ishmaelite, with his hand against every man and every man's hand against him. He should have had his eyes open and his mind centered on what he was doing, but his mind was upon the girl whom he had seen that afternoon and the vision of her was before his eyes.

The night was dark when he came into the broken country. The gloom was like a purple blanket beneath whose loose folds earth merged with air; the landmarks along the skyline were dissolved in a thick blur. But the pony had traveled this way before, and its eyes were better than the rider's, its nostrils caught the scents which the breeze carried; and as it learned the secrets which the darkness hid, its ears moved back and forth. Pretty Lance could not see beyond them, but there was no need; they would have warned him of what was awaiting him if he had been watching them as he had always done before.

He was still thinking of the girl when both the pony's ears went forward; he was awakened from his thoughts when it shied violently; he was fighting to regain a lost stirrup, groping for the butt of the rifle in its rawhide sheath beneath the stirrup leather, when a voice commanded him to halt.

The pony wheeled. A thin streak of orange cut the night, and Pretty Lance was settling into the saddle by the time the flat report violated the silence. He was racing on the back-track, and the Wichitas lay on his right; he reined aside and jerked the rifle from its scabbard; he was heading toward the mountains, and the little horse was lining out on a dead run when he saw two of those slender orange flashes ahead of him. The pony faltered in its stride, and he felt it falling under him; he heard the venomous voices of the rifles just before he left the saddle.

He was conscious of the shock of the fall, and after that there was a blank; then he found that he was crawling on his hands and knees through a thicket of mesquite; the thorns were slashing his flesh; the warmth of fresh blood was upon his face; and he discovered that he had hung onto his rifle.

The ugly game of hide-and-seek which followed must have lasted three hours or more. There were tedious intervals while he lay flat on his belly, listening for some slight sound which would betray the whereabouts of his hunters; there were minutes, which seemed to stretch into hours, while he crept an inch at a time toward new cover. Always he headed for the west. If he could only get past these men, he stood a chance of gaining sanctuary with his companions.

But there were six of them searching for him, and they were old hands at this business. He had made fun of them because of their age; now he realized that it had not dulled their wisdom. They were keeping their ears open, and whenever he tried to creep past them, he found one of them in front of him. At last he saw that the sky was turning pale along the horizon and he knew there would be no profit in getting through the cordon now. He had been set afoot and the dawn would catch him long before he reached the flanks of the mountains.

His head was clearing by this time, and he thought of the Quohada village. It was not more than five miles away and the horses were pastured near by. That was the one place where they wouldn't expect him to go, and if he could steal a pony before daylight he might be able to swing around to the north and make the mountains yet.

But the dawn overtook him on a grassy flat, and the sun was up before he finally gained cover in the thickets beside the creek. He halted in a bunch of quaking aspens and saw the pony herd across the stream. It was getting on toward the time when the squaws would be coming after water with the camp kettles and the boys would be racing out to catch up horses for their fathers. He was without a rope and he was a stranger; the animals would shy away from him and he would be lucky if he were able to catch one of them within the next half-hour. He looked about him for a hiding-place.

The oaks were scattered along the creek bottom and he could see the pointed tops of the lodges among them less than a quarter of a mile downstream. The thickets were near the bank: quaking aspens whose pale trunks and shivering leaves were shining in the early sunlight. Patches of dwarf willows and low brush with open spaces between them. The first low hills were west of him and the nearest was half a mile away, an isolated knob whose flanks were spotted with bushes until they attained the crest where black brush lay thick under a broken ledge of cap rock. He remembered the place from the days before he had left his people; there were open spaces in the brush where a man might lie all day long, watching the lowlands without risk of discovery. He was looking at the hill when he heard the little boy's outcry.

HIS luck had turned. It had always favored him before, and he had grown to believe that it would never fail him. But last night something had happened and his medicine was bad. He was searching his memory for the incident which had caused this misfortune when he heard the brush crack near by and saw a woman standing in the open space between the thickets. Then he knew what had spoiled his medicine.

For this was the girl whom he had seen yesterday afternoon; and he had been thinking of her last night, when he should have had his mind on his business. He recognized her at once; she was the white girl who had gone away with the young trader after his father had bought her for him, Pretty Lance—and the whole village had laughed at him. He lowered the rifle and shifted it to his left hand, his right hand dropped to his belt, and when he felt the handle of his sheath-knife, he said:

"Where are the other women?" His voice was dull; its utter lack of feeling gave it a shocking malignancy.

"I came alone," she told him. "I came to catch my pony. I was frightened when I saw you, and I called."

He was silent for a moment, listening; then he smiled—it was not a pretty sight. She was thinking that the little boy would be near the village. It would not be long before the alarm was raised; but the lodges which she could see through the trees might as well have been a hundred miles away, for all the help their inmates would give her. She watched him jerk the knife from its sheath. A moment ago she had believed that life did not hold anything for her; now she did not want to die. She found herself thinking of Sull. There was no sense in this wild hope that he might come to her. She was going to feel that knife upon her throat in a few seconds, and he would never know what had happened to her.

The drumming of unshod hoofs interrupted the silence. The venomous eyes which had held hers shifted for an instant. The ponies had ceased grazing and were trotting toward the creek. A rider was coming across the flat behind them, his body wrapped in a scarlet blanket. He was heading for the spot where Pretty Lance and Flower were standing, and the herd was drifting before him.

They were nearing the bank when the leader caught sight of the pair in the thicket; it tossed its head, and the others followed it as it wheeled away downstream. If the rider had noticed the abrupt change of direction he gave no sign of it, for he kept straight on; just then the folds of the scarlet blanket parted, his naked chest was bared,

and the big blue star which had been tattooed upon it showed before he gathered the blanket about him again. Pretty Lance uttered a single syllable.

"Huh!" It seemed incredible that a dead voice should carry so much cruelty. The hand that held the knife darted toward Flower. She felt the hilt of the knife pressing against her arm and the fingers sinking into her soft flesh, and the numbness which had come over her departed with the realization that she was not going to die yet. He whirled her about and shoved her before him so violently she would have fallen had he not jerked her to her feet. They plunged through the thicket and down the bank.

She was wading upstream, and he was at her heels; her moccasins were soaked through already, and the stones bruised her feet; she stumbled frequently and she heard him laughing to himself. She heard the horses blowing; the sound of their hoofs grew fainter and after that there was no sound except the splashing of her feet and the feet of the man behind her. She was out of breath; her side was hurting; but he struck her with the hilt of the knife.

"Go fast, or I will cut your throat!" he said.

They left the creek, and he was beside her while they ran across the bottomland. The hill, which he had picked for his hiding-place before she had confronted him, was near the edge of the stream. There were a few clumps of mesquite to give them cover while they crossed the flat. He drove her up the slope; her heart was pounding, and she was gasping for breath when they reached the brush near the summit. He flung her into a little opening among the bushes and squatted down beside her. He looked her over from head to foot and said:

"I will have fun with you today before I kill you."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



THE new day was touching the high peaks of the Wichitas and the gray twilight of the dawn was creeping across the flats when Sull rode out of the south to the ford beside the Medicine Bluffs. The shadows of the night enwrapped him again while he was making the crossing and the restlessness which had kept him in the saddle during the past twenty hours increased. The dusk in the lowlands was dissolving by the time he had left the creek a half mile behind him, but the promise of the sunrise did not relieve him of this uneasiness. It had been growing stronger ever since he had ridden away from the settlement by Bent's Creek. There was, so far as he could see, no reason for it; the country was peaceable now and Flower was going to the lodges of her adopted people.

"You are as jumpy as a woman," he told himself.

Whatever it was, it had taken complete possession of him. He had been sure of himself on the afternoon when he confronted Bermuda in Jess Dillon's Last Chance, but the assurance had been oozing away ever since he had that talk with Flower. Things had been happening fast and they weren't the sort of things to which he was accustomed. The discovery that this slip of a girl had blossomed into full womanhood had taken him completely by surprise; it was as if her beauty had been lying in ambush, and the realization that he was in love with her had left him dazed. In that moment when his serenity departed and diffidence replaced it—just as he was convinced that she was the one thing in life which he desired—she had run away from him. It was bewildering and he was badly shaken, but that didn't explain the reason for his fear.

It wasn't the first time he had been afraid, by any means. He had felt the little hairs on the back of his neck stirring more than once and the sensation had always been accompanied by a sort of exhilaration. This business of gambling his own life, however, was entirely different than wondering what might be happening to Flower while he was riding after her.

He had plenty of time for thinking during these days and nights, and the more he thought, the surer he became that the blame for her departure rested on him. For he couldn't forget that parting in Mrs. Hanrahan's kitchen last year, or the promise which he had made without the least intention of keeping it. He told himself that it would be different after he had brought her back this time. He wasn't going to lose sight of her again. And he was determined that he was going to settle that question of her people before he took her home. He could do that much for her, no matter whether she liked him or not.

DAWN was flowing along the flatlands; the little clouds were turning pink, and the tips of the western peaks were shining like pale jewels. The sun climbed over the skyline and he spurred his jaded horse to a running walk as he saw the Quohada village a mile or so ahead of him.

It was just about that time that the six Indian police, who had spent the night hunting Pretty Lance, pulled up their ponies on the flat north of the village.

"Go to your lodges," their leader bade them. "I will ride to the Agency and tell the soldiers what has happened."

Their villages were scattered along the lowlands and four of them lay north of this spot, so White Wolf remained beside the leader after the others dispersed. This affair was very close to him and its unsuccessful outcome had left him heavy-hearted. He was growing old and he had had a hard night; he was pretty well worn out and thoroughly discouraged. It wasn't his fault that they had failed to make the capture, but the authorities were not going to like it when they heard the news, and the responsibility for the whole business rested on his shoulders for the renegade had been a member of his band. He was wondering what the man who rode beside him would have to say, now that the two of them were alone.

This man was big for a Comanche; he stood more than six feet in his moccasins—he was the halfbreed son of a girl captive who had grown to womanhood in the Quohada lodges. His name was Quanah Parker and he had led the three southwestern tribes in last summer's campaign against the white invaders of the grasslands. This failure would not set well with him. White Wolf was pretty badly worried. Then Quanah spoke.

"You did not make him bad. You did the best you could."

They could see the peaks of the lodges through the oaks and the ponies across the creek, and the sight of the herd gave White Wolf an idea. He pulled up and pointed to the broken country where they had been hunting Pretty Lance last night. He said:

"He is not there. I do not think he went to the mountains. I think he came this way." He turned and pointed to the herd and Quanah caught the idea.

"Maybe so, he came to steal a horse."

"Maybe so." White Wolf nodded. "I will go see."

If Quanah had not been a man of parts he would have gone along, but he felt that this was his companion's business, and he understood how much the capture of the renegade would mean to the latter.

"I will ride to the village," he said. "I will wait till you come before I go on to the Agency."

It was, he realized, a bad bet, but he had played his hand against large odds many times during the old days while his followers were dodging soldiers and rangers out on the Llano, and sometimes he had won. He thought of his own youth when he had led a bunch of rebellious spirits away from his people; they had stolen horses all over Texas and carried off women from the lodges of their tribe; and the little band of renegades had grown until the older chiefs had made peace with them. Now Pretty Lance was doing very much the same thing and they were hunting him. And when they found him they would probably have to

kill him. The times had changed; whisky and poverty and the extinction of the bison herds had wrought the transformation; the old ways were bad ways.

He was thinking of these things as he rode into the village. It was almost an hour after sunup but the street was nearly deserted. Three or four squaws were looking for camp kettles, half a dozen pessimistic dogs were sniffing for garbage around the lodges. There was much litter and the grass should be growing where dust lay now. This business of learning how to earn a living like the white men had left a sordid touch, but the saddest thing about it was the fact that wild young hearts which used to make bold warriors made murderers today. He was getting off his pony when the little boy scudded across the flat among the post oaks.

It had been a short run, not more than a quarter of a mile, but the little boy had come fast and he was so spent that he would have fallen if Quanah had not caught him. He gulped for breath and tried to speak at the same time. It was a few moments before he was able to utter the first word. The squaws dropped their kettles when they heard it and one of them shrieked; a dozen men and women bolted out of the lodges. There was a small crowd around Quanah while he was trying to understand what the little boy was saying. He raised his hand to quiet them and saw Wood Duck coming toward him.

She was elbowing her way through the ring of men and women when her eyes met his, and she halted abruptly. He saw the fear that came into her face then and he was trying to understand the meaning of it when she heard Sull's horse and turned her head.

Quanah started toward his pony; he felt a hand upon his arm as he was picking up the reins; it was the woman who had been so frightened when she had recognized him a moment ago. She was pointing down the street; the words were falling from her lips in a torrent. He nodded and he went to meet the rider. He raised his hand and Sull pulled up.

"You want to find your woman," Quanah said. "You come with me."

He had outlined the situation before they left the village a hundred yards behind them. They were holding their animals to a walk and he was talking as deliberately as if rapine and murder and a girl's life were everyday matters.

"Mebbe so," he said, "Pretty Lance kills her if he sees us. We wait here."

They waited for some moments. The tumult in the village was the only sound. Sull's eyes were searching the thickets beside the creek but there was no sign of Flower or either of the men. The sharp report of a rifle broke the stillness and he turned his head in time to see a puff of white smoke dissolving above the brush on the hilltop.

Quanah said: "We ketchum now."

THERE was a little silence after Pretty Lance told Flower what he was going to do. She was lying as she had fallen when he had flung her down; her head was swimming, and she was sobbing for breath. She looked up into his face and he looked down at her; he was grinning like a savage dog. There was an ugly irony in this situation which appealed to him and he was making the most of it; he had plenty of time and it amused him to see the despair in her eyes.

Her mind played a queer trick on her. She remembered the night when she had lain in the lodge of White Wolf's women, waiting to hear the thin notes of his reed flute; she remembered how eager she had been to feel his arms around her, and the rude interruption which had followed. The interruption was over; he had come back into her life again. But the thoughts which had made her heart leap then turned her sick now.

The looseness left his lips while she was watching him; his face seemed to have grown leaner, and he was not looking at her any more. He picked up his rifle and flattened himself upon his belly; he parted the bushes before him



Flower was lying as she had fallen when flung down. Pretty Lance flattened himself and rested his rifle on a boulder.

and rested the weapon on a boulder. A moment later time was crowded with the confusion of violent action.

The brush enclosed the little opening on three sides, and the cap-rock rose like a low wall on the fourth side. The place commanded a wide panorama of pale green lowlands; they were bisected by a winding ribbon of dark green where the thickets marked the course of the creek, and they were dotted with oak trees in the middle distance. Near the foot of the hill they were blotched with patches of mesquite. The red blanket of the rider who was coming through the mesquite made a fine target. Pretty Lance started shooting.

The first slug kicked up a hatful of dust several yards behind White Wolf's pony; he saw the white smoke blossom on the hillside, and the flat report of the rifle was music in his ears. He urged his pony to the dead run. This was just about what he had expected. He was feeling pretty good now.

It had been a long, bad night. And there had been no pleasure in those moments while he had been riding toward the thicket beside the stream where Pretty Lance was hiding. But his spirits had begun to rise as soon as he reached the creek and saw the dark stain of fresh water on a rock which should have been dry. He had gambled on the chance that Pretty Lance would try to slip away rather than alarm the village by a rifle-shot, and he had won the bet.

The trail had been easy to read; it had been, in fact, too easy, and this had puzzled him. He was still wondering what these signs might mean, of two fugitives where there should have been one—when he heard the shot.

He scanned the flank of the hill while he was racing toward it. On the first hundred feet there was scant cover for a rabbit, but there were larger clumps of brush farther up, and there were a few boulders which had rolled down from the cap-rock. He knew how little attention the young men of his people paid to the nice technique of bead and rear sight, and he took his time picking a good spot. He found a heap of broken rock with a bunch of black brush beneath it.

The little horse he rode was slackening its pace by the time he was halfway to the shelter. The renegade's rifle was chattering above him like an angry old woman; he

pulled up and dived from the saddle; he made the last few yards on foot, and settled down to get his breath before he started firing.

His weapon was an old Spencer carbine; it was the first firearm that he had ever owned, and he was very proud of it, for the soldiers had given it to him when they had made him a policeman. He had tried hard to master this business of lining the sights, but he had spent the years of his manhood with an oaken bow, and the old habits were hard to overcome. Now he made up his mind to waste just enough lead to keep Pretty Lance busy up there. Sooner or later he was going to get a good shot. Only one shot—that was all he asked for; and when he got it, he was going to remember to pull that bead down low enough. . . .

Five minutes later Pretty Lance was lying on his belly, stuffing cartridges into the magazine of his rifle. He glanced at Flower. She had not moved; he let his eyes linger on her for a moment, and saw the change that had come into her face. Her eyes had been fixed on his, when he had looked at her before, but they had not seemed to see him; they were unconscious of his presence now, but the blankness of despair was gone; they were intent, as if she were listening to something.

HE had been so thoroughly engrossed in striving to put a slug through White Wolf that he had failed to catch the sound, but she had heard it during one of the brief intervals of silence between shots; she was trying to get it again when she realized that he was looking at her. He began shifting his position, and his belly never left the earth—it was like the sluggish movement of a half-coiled snake, and his eyes did not leave the girl until he had faced around. Then he parted the bushes with the other hand. He saw two riders, and he understood.

They had heard the firing and had come from the village. They had run their horses past the hill and were racing them up the opposite slope from the man who had been shooting at him. Pretty Lance started to reach for his rifle, but when his fingers touched the stock, he withdrew his hand and snatched the knife from his belt. He said:

"You are bad medicine."



*She said: "I want to go home." And he told her:
"It's all right; I'll take you home."*

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

He raised himself on one arm and lifted the knife. Flower saw it above her throat, and White Wolf saw the head and shoulders skylined. He had them framed in the notch of the rear sight; he lowered the bead until it was about to disappear. The old Spencer had a hard pull; he was trying to squeeze the trigger evenly, and it seemed as if the pressure never would leave off. It ceased abruptly; the head and shoulders were hidden by a fog of white smoke; the puff dissolved, and the target was no longer there.

White Wolf got to his feet and looked for his pony, but it had trotted away when the clamor of the rifles began and it was grazing on the flat now. He started running up the hill, but by the time he drew near the summit he had slowed down to a dog-trot. He was badly winded, and the pounding of his pulse was like the beating of a big drum, it was so loud that he could barely hear a dull voice droning above him. He knew what that sound meant and he was satisfied.

There were four persons in the little open space, and three of them were together on the downhill side: Quannah Parker was on his pony; he looked very tall against the cloudless sky, and his face was grave. Sull was near by; he was holding Flower in his arms. White Wolf took his place beside them without a word.

Pretty Lance was on his feet; he was leaning against the ledge of cap-rock, and he was facing his little audience. But he did not look at them; his eyes were on the wide panorama of the flatlands below. His voice was growing fainter, but his head was up, and there was something in his face which had not been there before. It erased the presence of the shoddy breeches and ragged shirt; it gave him dignity.

He was singing his death-song. He was chanting the story of the things which he had done. There was no music in his voice, but the words which would have been boastful at another time were dignified by the solemnity which ritual bestows.

The chant went on and on, the dull voice sank to a murmur and at last it ceased. There was a brief silence; then Quannah nodded to White Wolf and said:

"I will go to the Agency. I will tell them what you have done. They will feel good."



THINGS had happened very quickly. It was less than half an hour since Flower had slipped away from the village with the little boy; now she was riding back with Sull. They were riding double, and she was behind; and sometimes, when they were on rough ground, when the horse made a misstep, she had to clasp his waist to keep her seat. He never forgot those moments when he felt her arms about him.

She said: "I want to go home."

"It's all right," he told her. "I'll take you home."

But she went on as if she had not heard him:

"I was going to catch my pony, when he jumped out of the bushes. I think he was going to kill me then, but he saw my father coming." She did not tell him how she had thought of him when Pretty Lance drew his knife, and he did not tell her of the dread which had been riding him ever since he had left the settlement by Bent's Creek. If he had only said a word or two, the pride which kept her silent would have been dissolved by understanding. But, in the harsh lands where he had roved, decent women were rare, and, usually, they were badly weatherworn; he had let them alone, and the only wooing he had done had been rough and tumble. He would have been diffident enough in her presence under any circumstances, and the memory of what had come and gone between them left him with about as much self-assurance as a boy whose voice is changing. So he remained dumb while she recited the story.

"You see how it was," she said after she had finished. "He had the knife in his hand just before you rode up. He told me I was bad medicine and he was going to cut my throat. I was afraid. That was why I ran to you when you came."

She had come straight to him; she had called him by his name and he had held her in his arms. The memory of that moment was indelible, but he did not tell her this. He said:

"I see." He couldn't have done worse if he had tried.

He pulled up before the lodges a few moments later. Flower slid from the horse's back and she was talking

with her foster father when Sull dismounted. He shook hands with Quanah and the latter rode away. White Wolf had gone and Flower was standing where he had left her. A dozen squaws and twice as many children were watching her in silence. She said:

"Please, you do what I say? You put your arm around me?" And, if the beady eyes in the audience had been searching for any signs of domestic infelicity, they were cheated then.

"We will go to my father," Flower told him, "and please, you will keep your arm around me. You see, he does not know I ran away, and he thinks you are my husband." Her voice seemed to fail her for just an instant but, when she went on, it was as steady as ever.

"He will ask us questions. Please, you will lie to him. Tell him like we are happy; it will make his heart glad."

And Sull said:

"Sure, I'll tell him." It had been on the tip of his tongue to suggest that this needn't be a lie, that she could make his heart glad too, but he didn't. And she never suspected it was longing that made his voice so gruff.

"You will be very careful?" Her eyes were appealing now. "Because I think he knows some English words. You will make up the lies when he asks you questions and I will speak them for you, just like you say them."

"I'll stick with you," he promised.

It was dim inside the lodge after the hot sunshine; the air was thickened with the smell of stale wood-smoke. White Wolf had thrown his blanket aside and the big blue star on his chest looked black; his bare torso was as dull as old copper in the half-light. He seemed to have grown older since he had come in here; his face was set, as if he was tired out from what he had been through and was holding himself in hand to deal with what lay ahead of him.

He was standing in the middle of the lodge when they came in and he stepped forward to meet them. His features lost their heaviness then as if a beam of light had fallen on them, and he took Flower in his arms; he kissed her on both cheeks. Sull remembered the afternoon when he had watched their parting under the dead tree by the ford of the Canadian, and how he had wondered at the warmth of the farewell. It seemed a long, long time ago.

"He's missed her a lot," he told himself, "and she's missed him, too." It did not seem strange now as it had then, and it occurred to him that she hadn't been having a good time since that night when he had snatched her from the bed where she was lying in the women's tepee while the warriors were drinking Luis Turango's whisky around the fires on the flat in Palo Duro cañon.

He listened to their voices; he didn't know a half a dozen words of the language but he knew what they were saying; baby names, pet names; there was no mistaking these endearments; he felt like an interloper as he stood there. And, when White Wolf turned away from her at last and held out his hand, Sull took it with a feeling that the project which he had undertaken so blithely last year had not brought happiness to anyone as yet.

"We will sit down and talk with him," Flower said. "Please, you will remember what I told you?"

"I'll remember." And he tried to look like a young husband with a clear conscience while he speculated as to what turn the questioning was going to take, and whether he would be able to meet those black, implacable eyes without betraying himself as a liar. But when they had seated themselves on the big buffalo robe which carpeted most of the lodge, Flower was the one who was questioned first.

She was a long time answering and Sull watched her face while she was speaking. It held a peculiar expression when she began, it was as if the question had taken her breath, then she smiled and her eyes shone; they were still shining when she turned to him. There was a little

catch in her voice, a hesitancy which she couldn't hide entirely. She said:

"He asked me why I came alone last night, and why you came after me this morning. I must think fast then, so that he does not see I am telling him a lie, and I spoke the words that came into my mind. I do not know why I thought of them but they came. I told him how I ran away last year because I was so lonely and you found me, and how you asked me that night to go to the church with you and get married like the white people. I told him that I promised you to do that some time; that was why we made this journey, and I went ahead because I wanted to see him and my mother. It was the only thing that I could think of. And, please, you say something to him now, and I will tell him,"—she caught her breath again,— "I will tell him that we did not wait to go to the church like the white people do. You see it has been so long and he would not understand."

"You tell him that for me," Sull bade her, and he looked into White Wolf's eyes as he went on: "She has been a good wife. She has made me happy."

He saw the gratitude in Flower's face when he finished and he smiled at her; she returned the smile before she began interpreting. Then he watched White Wolf again.

"That makes them both feel good," he thought, and he was telling himself that he had done pretty well, when White Wolf spoke.

He talked for some time, and, after he had finished, Flower drew a deep breath.

"He says that he is glad because I am a good wife for you. He says it is right that we should go to the church, for that is the way of your people and they are my people now. He says"—her eyes remained fixed on his and her face gave no sign of the tumult within her—"that he was feeling bad when he saw us this morning because I did not bring a baby with me, and it is more than a year since you took me for your wife."

Sull never understood why it was that his answer came to him so easily. He did not know how eager his face was when he made it.

"Tell him that you are not to blame. Tell him I had to leave you alone last summer and go away to help the soldiers fight his people; and after the fighting was over I had to stay away for a long time to make a living. But I do not have to leave you any more now."

If he had owned the facility which makes some men able liars, he couldn't have done better; and if he had had the skill of a more sophisticated wooer, he couldn't have done as well. It was his longing that had prompted him, and his voice was more convincing than any words. The black old eyes which had been watching him were soft and the set lines in the dark face relaxed. White Wolf nodded.

"Good." It was the only English he had spoken. But Sull was not looking at him, for Flower's eyes were holding his. The two of them were very close to understanding in that moment. Then he remembered the promise he had made himself so many times during the long ride from Bent's Creek. He said:

"Will you ask him a question for me? Tell him it's something I've got to know. Ask him if he remembers where you came from, and who your folks are."

SHE had turned away before he finished speaking; her back was toward him while she repeated what he had said and when she faced him again, it seemed to him that a change had come over her; he did not know what it was, but it was there.

"He says he does not know. It was a long time ago and he remembers that there was a man and a woman. The woman was standing in the door of a house. It was a log house. The man was working with a hoe in the corn. He says the Quohadas were stealing horses when they saw the man, and I ran out of the house when

they rode up. He says they killed the man and the woman, and he leaned down from his pony and picked me up. It was somewhere south of the Llano; it was in a little valley—"

"The Cibolo Valley," Sull interrupted. She shook her head:

"He does not know. Now I will go and see my mother before you take me away." Her voice was as lifeless as the voice of an old woman.

"You're tired out," he said.

And she repeated dully: "Tired out."

It was, he told himself, no wonder, for she had been through a good deal this morning. And, now that he came to think about it, there was no reason why she should have shared his anxiety to learn who her people were. As far as she was concerned, they never had existed, and maybe that was just as well, the way things had turned out. As a matter of fact he wasn't particularly worried over his failure himself. He had come to the end of his search and he had drawn a blank and it didn't matter in the least. Her folks belonged to the past and his hopes didn't lie there. It was Flower who mattered now.

He was thinking of the way she had looked at him when she had repeated her answer to White Wolf's first question, and how she had remembered the night when he had promised to take her to the church. He recalled the way she had come to him on the hilltop this morning. It was, so she had said, because she was afraid. But she had run to him and she had thrown her arms around him. Surely she wouldn't have done that if she didn't like him!

"All you have got to do," he told himself, "is ask her. Dodge City's not so very far. There's a church there. Ask her if she'd go."

HIS hopes were high that morning while Flower lingered in the lodge of White Wolf's women. It was nearing noon when the two of them rode from the village, and took the old Indian trail which they had traveled from Bent's Creek. It was afternoon when they forded Medicine Bluff Creek, and during all this distance she had not said a word. His high hopes were beginning to subside. The Agency buildings and the post lay off to their left and two hours later the road was a faint track in the sod. She pulled up her pony and Sull reined up beside her. She said:

"It is all right. No one will see us now. So you do not need to ride with me any more."

He started to interrupt but she went on as if he had not spoken:

"You have been good to me and I have made much trouble for you. I am sorry you had to come after me but if you had not come it would have been bad; it would have made my father and my mother feel sad if they had known I ran away. I am very thankful because you told those lies for me."

He was trying to speak again, but she said:

"Please, you will not think of the thing I told my father, about getting married. It was strange that I remembered that. I do not understand why it was, but it came into my head and so I said it. I was a little Indian girl that night when you promised to take me to the church, but I am grown up and I am a white girl now. I had forgotten all about the way I talked with you that night." She caught her breath. "Just like I forgot about the man and woman that were killed when my father carried me away to his village. I do not want to remember any of those things again."

She faced him then. It was the first time that she had met his eyes and he remembered afterward how her chin went up. She said:

"I will go back to Mrs. Hanrahan and Anne. Please let me go alone."

She touched the pony with her heels and rode away.



THE doeskin dress was not as loose as it used to be; the moccasins were nearly worn out; but by this time tomorrow, Flower was thinking, she would be back at Mrs. Hanrahan's; she would have them packed in the tin trunk and she would never put them on again. This was as far ahead as she could plan; she didn't care what lay beyond.

It was high noon and a hot day, a saw-fly was droning somewhere in the cottonwoods and she could hear her pony cropping grass beyond a wild plum thicket. The cottonwoods and oaks and a few big walnut trees shut off the harsh white sunshine and she could smell the cool breath of the river; there was green moss on some of the larger trees, and there were bits of flotsam from the early summer freshets hanging in the lower branches. But the Canadian was low now and there was a wide stretch of sand bar under the bank. The old trail from Fort Elliot to Camp Supply made a dark streak across the white bar; it scarred the earthen bank and wound up the first bench to bare spaces where the grass was turning brown. There were several little patches of ashes and charred sticks beside it, and she had made her nooning among the trees because she did not like these desecrations.

She picked up a *parfleche* bag of jerked meat which her foster mother had given her the day she left the reservation and tied it to the bed-roll behind her saddle; she took the bridle from the saddle-horn and she started to catch up the pony, but she halted after the first two steps, for she saw Bermuda riding down the trail.

He was a good three hundred yards away but she knew him the moment she caught sight of him. He was coming toward the river from the north and he was crossing the open benchland.

It chanced that there was a big walnut tree close by the spot where she was standing. She dropped the bridle and stepped behind it. He was holding his horse to a Spanish trot and his hat was pulled low over his eyes, his shoulders were bent and she was thinking, "He'll make the crossing and he'll be out of sight in a few minutes." But, when he drew near the bank, he straightened abruptly and reined up.

Her heart slowed down then. She had left a plain trail where she had turned off the old road into the timber; but whatever it was that had attracted his attention was ahead of him; it was beyond the southern bank of the river. She breathed more freely but immediately after that her heart seemed to stop beating entirely. For she saw the rider coming from the south.

Bermuda got off his horse and led it into the timber. He returned to the trail a moment later and he was carrying his long-barreled Sharps rifle. He sat down at the break of the bank, with the rifle across his lap, and if Flower could have seen his face his heavy complacency would have frightened her. But she was not looking at him now; she was on her hands and knees beside her pack-roll, and she was breathing thickly while her fingers fumbled with the knots in the rawhide lashings.

The timber was scattered, across the river, and the benchland beyond the opposite bank was dotted with oak and walnut trees. You could see the trail for a long way from the place where Bermuda was sitting, but the tops of the cottonwoods in the river bottom shut off stretches of it on the higher ground. The rider who was approaching from the south had reached one of these places and disappeared behind the curtain of green leaves.

He was more than three hundred yards away when Bermuda had caught sight of him; the glimpse had been brief and three hundred yards is a long distance for a careful man to make sure of recognition if he hasn't time for a good look. But there wasn't any mistaking that

rawboned buckskin, and there wasn't another rider in this part of the country who had that habit of leaning back against the cantle on level ground. It was Sull all right. Bermuda was dead certain.

There wasn't enough wind to cool the side of a wet finger—he had made sure of that—and he noted that the green tops of the cottonwoods across the river were motionless; even the leaves were not shivering. From the spot where he was sitting to the place where the trail reappeared on this side of the green curtain, it was just about two hundred and fifty yards, and, for the next fifty yards to the break of the bank, the yellow grass was gleaming in the sunshine. Point-blank range; a raw hand couldn't ask for a more perfect target than a man riding at a walk outlined against that glowing background, and Bermuda had been making good money breaking the necks of buffalo bulls at two and three times the distance.

He rubbed his palms against his breeches to wipe away the sweat. He murmured:

"Like shooting fish in a barrel!"

Sull seemed to be taking his time.

"I can," the watcher assured himself, "wait jest as long as he can." He rubbed his hands upon his legs again and swore at the heat. The idea of waiting brought an unpleasant suggestion: two could play at that as well as one. He was turning this over in his mind when Sull came into sight. He crooked his thumb over the big hammer and when he drew it back to the full cock the click sounded so loud that it startled him.

Sull had shoved his hat back so far that a streak of hair showed; his face looked pale in contrast with the black hair; it was a fine bull's-eye. Apparently he hadn't seen Bermuda yet, or if he had, he wasn't paying any attention. Or wasn't he? You couldn't tell. He never did the thing that was expected. But there was one certainty: every step the horse took brought him a little nearer, the target grew a little larger.

AND haste, Bermuda reflected, makes waste. This was no time to indulge in wastefulness. He had one shot to spend, and if it wasn't judiciously invested, the odds were lost. He waited.

The patch of shade had been invisible before the horse and rider entered its faint obscurity. Bermuda's palms were slippery; he rubbed away the sweat.

"When he comes out of that shadder," he promised himself, but he had a feeling while he made the promise that his big opportunity was gone. The shade covered a wider area than he had suspected, and he was still sitting with the rifle across his knees, his hands had grown so wet that he could feel the little rivulets of sweat crawling over the palms, when Sull rode down the bank.

They were looking into each other's faces while the buckskin splashed through the shallows, and if there was any emotion on Sull's face, it didn't betray itself at this distance. It didn't show while the buckskin plunged into the swimming water. Bermuda saw the holstered pistol at the saddle-horn; the rider's hand made no movement toward the weapon; he hadn't changed his attitude since he had first appeared. Bermuda sighed heavily.

He was sitting there at the break of the bank, in the shade of a wild-plum thicket, and he was rubbing his palms on his breeches when Sull rode across the sandbar.

"You better uncock that rifle, Bermuda," Sull said. "It might go off and hurt somebody." He wasn't smiling, and he wasn't grave; his indifference was like a bucket of cold water. Bermuda crooked his thumb over the hammer and let it down. He said:

"The' was something bustin' through the brush when yo' come in sight. I reckoned it was a deer."

He rose and went to his horse, and he was starting to swing into the saddle when he remembered something; he led the horse back to the bank and he looked Sull in the eye. His ignobility was gone, there was resolution in his

face now, and when he spoke, his voice had something close to dignity.

"That lawyer in Mobeetie who made out them deeds wants his money. It will be twenty-five dollars. I done told him to send the bill to yo'."

He mounted, and he was riding across the sandbar when Sull saw Flower in the wild-plum thicket above the bank where Bermuda had been sitting, and his indifference vanished.

"Did he do anything to you?" he asked.

She shook her head as she said:

"Now I know why you did not kill him that time."

"He didn't make you any trouble?" Sull's voice was sharp.

"He didn't know that I was here," she told him, and he saw the knife then. She was on her knees, close to the break of the bank, with one hand implanted on the earth, and the knife was in the other hand. She knew that he had seen it from the look in his face. And she said:

"I told you not to come. I said I wanted to ride alone." She said it so quickly that he wanted to smile.

It was the sight of the knife that had done it; there wasn't any getting away from that. He had the picture of Bermuda sitting on the bank with the rifle across his lap, within arm's-length of her. He knew why she had crept into the thicket and what she would have done the moment that Bermuda started to raise the weapon to his shoulder. That was a long chance she had taken; he understood why she had done it. And he realized that it wouldn't do to blunder now. So he made no sign that he had seen the knife, and he did not smile when she reproached him.

He dismounted; and when he was facing her again, the knife was hidden. He said:

"I have kept you in sight most of the time since you rode away. And I'm not going to let you out of my sight again. Maybe you don't like it. I can't help it."

He was feeling surer, now that he had started talking. She had got to her feet, and she was looking into his face; there was no anger in her eyes, but if there had been, he would have gone on, anyway. He said:

"It would break my heart if I had to leave you." And he saw her little breasts heaving under the doeskin dress as she caught her breath.

She came to him and she put her hands on his shoulders. She said: "I will be good."

The trail to Bent's Creek followed the river westward; they rode up the old trail which led to the north. And on the afternoon when they left Dodge City for the settlement, Flower said:

"We will get a nice place for the camp tonight. Maybe it will be like that other place where you found me last year. And I will make the bed the way I wanted to that time. And when we get back home, I will tell Annie and Mrs. Hanrahan."

THE END

H	O	S	E	T	A	P	E	D	S	C	A	R
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Solution of the
Crossword Puzzle
on page 85.



The dead man was the bushy-browed guy. . . Margo Starr let out a shrill scream.

FLORIDA FLING

She was very lovely, even when she called him a goon—"a monumental goon!" But that was before she knew he was a G-man on the job. . . . A complete novel—

by Edwin Rutt



GOT off the Florida Special at Brightwater, and a porter with a face like shoe-shine took my bags.

"The Gulfland Hotel," I told him.

"Dey got deir own bus," the porter grinned.

"It'll save you a taxi."

I followed him to the bus. There didn't seem to be any other passengers. The driver went into the station for something or other, and while he was gone the streamliner gathered herself, tooted her funny little whistle and began crawling off toward St. Petersburg, like a gigantic purple-and-silver caterpillar.

I lit a cigarette and contemplated Brightwater. It looked all right. There was a wide main drag called Cleveland Street, lined with shops. At intervals near the curbs were orange-colored benches where a guy could drop down and rest his dogs. The people were elderly for the most part, but they looked nice and friendly. The April sun was like warm golden honey.

Sandy Morgan—that's me—began to like it.

I liked it even better when the driver came out and we started for Brightwater Beach. We went up Cleveland Street, crossed Fort Harrison Avenue, passed a movie show, a restaurant, a filling-station and I don't know what else and then the road dipped toward a causeway. There was a scent of orange blossoms, very faint, on the early afternoon air. Off to the right I caught glimpses of live oaks dripping with Spanish moss, flame vine and bougainvillea, and a big tree all out in lavender blossoms that looked like a jacaranda. Beyond was Brightwater Bay, blue as a sapphire.

"Your first time down hyah?" the driver said. He was a long lean bird—a Cracker, I guess you'd call him.

"Yes. I'm pretty late in the season, eh?"

"I dunno," he said. "April's a good month." He scratched his head with his left hand. "Beats me why folks want to go Nawth about naow. It's jes' gettin' nice hyah."

We crossed the causeway. It's two or three miles long and connects the mainland with Brightwater Beach. And it's a pretty ride. Palms all along the way, and in the middle, between the two roads, a footpath bordered by about a million red, white, pink and purple petunias. The city fathers of Brightwater have done all right by that causeway.

Well, we rattled over it; and then, for the first time in my life, I saw the Gulf of Mexico.

I can describe the Gulf in one word—swell. That, however, doesn't give much of a picture of the vast sweep that lay before me; blue-gray in color far out, with the

sun stitching a pattern of gold sequins across the broad roll of it; lighter in toward shore, with hints of jade and bronze in the shallower water. The waves were small and gentle. The Gulf of Mexico has dignity.

"Morgan," I said to myself, "you're going swimming."

And I did, within the next half-hour. The hotel wasn't a hundred yards from the beach. So after they'd given me a nice room with a palm tree waving graciously just outside the window, I got into my bathing-trunks. The boy who brought up my bags had showed me a flight of wooden steps leading from the second floor down to a court in back of the hotel. If you used them, you didn't have to traipse through the lobby in your bathing-suit.

I had the beach pretty much to myself. There were three or four fat elderly gentlemen sunning behind glass wind-breakers, though after March in New York, the wind felt like the ghost of a zephyr to me. A few kids were playing in the sand at the water's edge. And out in the drink itself I saw a couple of bathing-caps bobbing around like big white corks.

The old gentlemen behind the glass dinguses opened their eyes, stared at me disinterestedly and went back to dozing. I entered the water.

At first it felt like electrified ice. But after I'd dipped, I came up warm and tingling. And all the dust and tiredness of the trip down slipped away from me. I felt exhilarated. I put my face in the water and crawled it out a ways. I felt like shouting, and I wanted to get far enough off so I wouldn't disturb the lizards back of the glass gadgets.

Presently I stopped swimming and found that I couldn't touch bottom any more. So I raised up, treading water, and then I did shout, at a passing porpoise headed in the general direction of Cuba.

"Hiya, Henry!" I shouted. "Going South? A pleasant trip, and my respects to the Missus."

Right there somebody laughed, and it wasn't the porpoise.

I whipped around, feeling like a fool. Evidently one of the white bathing-caps had snuck up on me, because there it was, bobbing not ten feet away. Below the cap were a couple of big dark eyes—very amused, just then.

"Friend of yours?" the girl asked, pointing at the porpoise.

I tried to cover my embarrassment by more clowning. "Uh-huh," I said. "That's old Henry Richardson. We went to the same college. We were on the swimming team."

"Neptune University, I presume?" The eyes regarded me gravely.

"That's right. Good old Neptune."

She started to swim away. "Well, sorry I interrupted. You boys go ahead and have a nice reunion."

"Hey, wait a minute," I called. And that was the beginning of a big crimp I put in my own carefully pre-conceived plans.

I'd chosen the Gulf coast—or, to be strictly honest—my boss in the Department up in New York had chosen it for me, because I really did need a rest. According to the boss, a guy who'd been dumb enough to stop a bullet with his shoulder would get in no end of trouble at some place like Miami or Palm Beach where there were racetracks and hot spots and other quagmires of temptation. The Gulf coast, said the boss, was quiet, inhabited largely by elderly people and churches. And they did all but blow a curfew at ten P.M. That was the place for Sandford J. (Sandy) Morgan. And he, the boss, was going to give Sandy Morgan a leave of absence in which to recuperate.

All that being so, it might have been smart of me to let this white-capped dark-eyed number swim gracefully out of my life. Of course, I didn't.

"Hold it!" I said, louder because she was disregarding my other command.

She turned and swam back. "Yes, sir?"

"It occurs to me," I said, "that you might be staying at the hotel."

"Well, I am. And I suppose you are too." She brushed water out of her eyes and searched my face. "But I never saw you before."

"I only just came," I said. "Nobody's seen me. Except some lizards on the beach."

She laughed. It was a low laugh, very sophisticated. "Lizards! Porpoises! For a newcomer, you certainly got hand-in-glove with the wild life quickly."

"I'm of a democratic turn of mind," I said. Then, like a dope, I looked at her hard and added: "But my preferences are for civilization."

She returned the look, and hers was just as hard as mine. "Well, if that's the case, I'm Margo Starr. And you can walk along the beach with me."

"I'm Sandy Morgan," I told her. "And I'd be delighted."

We swam to shore then, and in the shallows Margo took off her bathing-cap. Her hair fell to her shoulders in a blue-black cloud.

"Got any cigarettes, Morgan?" she asked.

I had some in my dressing-gown, and I lit one for her. She puffed it, drying her shoulders vigorously with a red-and-white towel. She had a lovely figure. There was about five-foot-six of it, all lines and soft curves. Nature had forgotten to throw in hips.

"Let's smoke before we walk," I suggested. We flopped in the clean sand.

Margo cupped her chin in her hands and looked at me speculatively. "Soldier, sailor, tinker, tailor?" she said.

Ever since the yellow monkeys pulled that fast one at Pearl Harbor, I've been a little embarrassed when anyone asks me what I do. You see, there's over six feet and a hundred and eighty pounds of me, not badly distributed if I do say so. And it's obvious to the naked eye that this set-up hasn't been around for thirty summers yet. So the casual observer thinks: Ho! Here's material for a uniform. Why isn't it in one?

The devil of it is, nine times out of ten, I can't tell 'em why. I've got to stall around and say that I'm on special Government assignments. Which is perfectly true. But of course, casual observers don't believe me. They say, doubtfully, "Oh, yes;" and "Isn't that interesting?" and make reproving noises by putting their tongues against the roofs of their mouths.

It would have given me great personal satisfaction to inform Margo Starr that she was in the presence of the fellow who'd had the luck to get Erich Moldauer at El Paso just as that fancy Nazi was about to step across the

border. But I couldn't. The likes of me have to tuck it in and go on stopping bullets from Erich Moldauer and others of his ilk, with nary a plaudit. . . . Oh, well!

"I do Government work," I told Margo Starr.

She was quick on the uptake. "All right, Morgan," she said. "Don't tell me. But you aren't doing Government work here?"

"No, ma'am. I'm on a kind of sabbatical."

We took our walk then and when we got back Margo poured herself into a gorgeous light-lavender beach-robe. It went very well with her black hair.

"Well, so long," she said. "It's been fun."

"Here," I said. "This won't do." I liked her, and besides, I was visualizing a long lonely evening. "What about tonight?"

"Well, what about it?"

"Why, I don't know. Dinner, the drama, the dance—you name it. I'm new to these parts." I winked away a vision of my boss that suddenly seemed to come and lurk accusingly just in back of my eyes.

Margo Starr was laughing at me. "My dear boy, this isn't Broadway. Of course, though, it's bingo night at the hotel."

"Unh-unh," I said. "All those nickels make me nervous."

"Then I don't know what I can do for you. Especially since I've got a—a sort of date tonight."

"How late's your date?" I asked. I was growing restless, thinking of that void of an evening ahead. "Couldn't you get back in time for a midnight swim?"

She hesitated. "Now, that might be fun. I'll meet you here at twelve sharp. But see that you are here."

"I'll swim with you at midnight," I said, "though hell should bar the way." I am no mean paraphraser of poetry when I get going.

CHAPTER TWO



FTER I'd dressed there was still a good deal of the afternoon left. I was wondering how to put it in, when I suddenly remembered a chore I had to do.

It seemed that Chick Chickering, a pal of mine in the Department, knew a girl who had been staying at Brightwater Beach for the winter. When he heard that I was going there, he wanted me to look her up.

"Listen, Sandy," Chick had said earnestly, "I hate asking you to do this. But she's a kid from my home town—Winkona, Wisconsin, you know. And I—well, I'd just like you to drop in on her and give her my love."

"Don't hate it on my account," I said. "I'm always glad to meet a new and beautiful face."

Chick had been quiet a moment. Then he'd said: "That's the trouble, Sandy. Bea Westfall is a swell kid, all right. And nobody's fonder of Bea than I am. But her own mother would have to admit that she's a dead ringer for Mortimer Snerd's twin sister."

Consequently it was with some misgivings that I started out to look for this cookie. Chick had given me all the dope: Bea Westfall and a maiden aunt had taken a house called Mandalay Cottage, near the end of the island on which Brightwater Beach is located.

Down in the hotel lobby one of the porters—in a mulberry-colored uniform—gave me explicit directions as to how to get to Mandalay Cottage. It was a good mile walk, the porter added.

Well, on a gorgeous blue-and-gold day like this, it didn't seem much to hoof it a mile on behalf of a pal. So off I went.

And if I'd have just kept going, everything would have been all right. But I didn't. Because a bar and grill loomed suddenly on my left.

Not that I can't pass a bar and grill. But it suddenly occurred to me that I'd come to Florida cold, fallen in love with the place on sight, had a midnight date with an uncommonly pretty girl, and was feeling generally happy. It also occurred to me that I hadn't had a drink since stepping off the Florida Special. Furthermore, I was on the way to call on Mortimer Snerd's twin sister, and a guy in a spot like that needed a drink. I turned into the bar and grill.

There was an elderly gentleman hanging around the entrance to the place. He had on an oyster-white sports-shirt, gray slacks and tennis shoes. He was a tall thin guy with a scrawny neck and a gray mustache. I wouldn't have given him a second glance except that, just as I was going up the steps into the bar, our eyes clashed.

His were the coldest, steeliest eyes I've ever seen in a human head.

"Good afternoon," he said, very pleasantly.

I replied in kind, and entered the bar.

Once inside, I seemed to be Patron Number Two. Patron Number One was ensconced on a stool with half a quart of rye in front of him. And it was evident that Patron Number One had already had more than a couple.

He was a youngish dark-complexioned man, and he looked small, sitting there hunched over the bar. He had a blue chin and bushy eyebrows that met over a short thick nose. When I first came in, he didn't even look up from his drink.

I ordered Scotch and water, and a fat red-faced bartender fixed it for me. I sipped it, and suddenly I saw that the bushy-browed guy was giving me the double-o.

I must have looked like a blur to him, because the rye had put a beautiful glaze over his eyes. Nevertheless he acted as if he had seen something, or thought he had. He straightened perceptibly and gave me a hard stare. He held the stare for a full minute. Then, as if dismissing me from his mind, he took another drink. Before he had finished it, he beckoned to the bartender and paid his bill. I drank my Scotch and forgot about him. The bartender went to the end of the bar and started polishing glasses.

Presently I was conscious that Bushy Brows was about to leave us. His stool scraped over the floor. He came sidling along the bar.

Then a funny thing happened.

He stopped just behind me. And since I don't like strangers getting in behind me, I whipped my head around quickly.

To my complete astonishment, the bushy-browed bird hissed at me out of the side of his mouth. It was certainly more of a hiss than a whisper:

"You got the sense you was born with, tella," he said, in a low voice, "you'll get the hell out of here!"

Just that, and not another word. For a moment, it floored me. By the time I'd collected myself, he was outside the door.

I moved then. I chucked a dollar bill on the bar and ran after him. But I was too late. When I reached the road, he was already in his car and it was moving. I shouted "Hey!" after him. But he didn't look back.

Well, that was a funny one. What the devil did the guy mean? Was he warning me away from this bar because it was a clip-joint or something? If that was the case, it was nice of him to put me wise. But it didn't seem to be a matter to hiss about, tensely and dramatically. Still, I thought, the smallest things get pretty important in the mind of a drunk.

I went back inside.

"Say," I said to the bartender, "who was that fellow?"

"Search me, brother," the bartender said. "I never saw him before."

I let myself puzzle about the matter a few minutes longer; then I shrugged it off. It just didn't make sense. I knew not a soul in Florida, except Margo Starr. Bushy Brows had simply been blind-o—certainly too blind-o to

be driving a car—and he didn't know what he was doing or saying. Or else, through his alcoholic fog, he had got me confused with a couple of other guys. In any case, the thing wasn't worth the second thought I was giving it.

Outside again, I saw the elderly gent with the cold eyes ambling along on the other side of the road. He didn't so much as glance my way, and I proceeded unmolested to Mandalay Cottage.

I found it easily. It was a cute little house, smack on the beach. Next door was an imposing residence, also facing the beach, and with a neat green lawn at the back. A couple of expensive-looking cars were visible through the open door of the garage. I walked between the two houses around to the front of Mandalay Cottage.

A colored maid answered my ring and informed me that "Miz Bea-truss" was on the beach. She pointed, and I caught a glimpse of a yellow bathing-suit under a green-and-white sun umbrella about fifty yards away. I went up to the umbrella.

"Er—excuse me," I said politely.

THERE was a little flurry of sand kicked up by a pair of blue espadrilles, and a face popped out from under the umbrella.

At that point, I made a fool of myself. I felt my jaw drop a foot, and there wasn't a thing I could do about it.

Then I remembered something that I ought to have remembered all along: Chick Chickering was a great kiddier. Mortimer Snerd's sister, in a pig's eye! This girl would have been a sensation at Malibu Beach.

She was just swell, is all. No other word for it. Pale-gold hair with little copper fires burning in it; enormous blue eyes; a sun-tanned heart-shaped face; a curving red mouth with a dimple at the northeast corner. In the canary-colored bathing-suit, her figure looked like a slim yellow torpedo. Do you blame Morgan for being temporarily shaken?

"Um—ah," I said foolishly, "I'm a friend of Chick Chickering's."

She gave me an encouraging grin. "Why, how nice of you to look me up! Do sit down. It sounds trite, but—well, any friend of Chick's—"

I sat in the sand under the umbrella and told her my name. "Ordinarily," I said, "I don't believe in these long-distance introductions. I always figure the party of the second part doesn't want to be bothered. But Chick insisted. He said you had a kind heart."

"Oh, he did?" said Bea Westfall. "What else did he say about me?"

"Nothing much," I lied, shuddering at the callousness of a man who could pack this girl and Mortimer Snerd into the same thought, "except he's very fond of you."

"He better had be," Miss Westfall said. "We live right next door to each other back home, and he's my—my adopted brother."

I forbore to observe that she'd adopted a liar and a buffoon for a brother.

"What are you doing in Florida, Sandy?" Bea asked.

"I'm here to rest," I said firmly, and hoped I meant it. I couldn't, of course, be sure now.

For I was thinking that I hadn't been in the place half a day, and already I'd met up with no less than two cold knockouts. I mean, extraordinarily good-looking girls. Of course, it was just a happen-so, an inexplicable one, seeing that the gods had never dealt Morgan a hand like that before. But at that point, I was forced to think of my boss.

What was it he'd said about the Gulf coast? Elderly people, churches, and the sidewalks going in at ten P.M.? Well, I just had to laugh. Here was Morgan with a gorgeous blonde for one arm and a flashing brunette for the other! And the boss himself had sent me here. That was a hot one, eh?

"What are you chuckling about, Sandy?" Bea asked.

"A funny story I heard back in New York," I said. "But it isn't repeatable."

"You're very rude," said Bea. "Chick has made some very rude friends since he left Winkona."

Before I could square myself, we had a kind of distant interruption. The elderly man whose eyes had arrested me outside the bar loomed on the horizon. He was walking along the beach, just at the edge of the water. Every now and again he stopped to pick up a shell.

Bea Westfall said, with a little grimace: "Oh, Lord! There's Mr. Fordyce. I hope he doesn't come over."

"Why?" I said. "I met him on the way up here and he spoke very civilly."

"I suppose I'm mean to say it," Bea said. "But he's an awful bore."

"Who is he?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't know. Just a retired business man. He has a house a little way up the beach. And sometimes he comes over and—well, he just sits."

"A marathon sitter, eh?"

"Sort of. I wouldn't mind it so much if he'd only say something once in a while. But he just looks at you. He gives me the creeps. And I feel horrible saying it, because I suppose he's really a nice old gentleman."

I said: "Why don't you hire me to keep Mr. Fordyce away, Bea? Because he's passing us right now."

It was true. The old guy merely waved and pattered on along the beach, collecting his shells.

"Sandy," said Bea, "would you like a drink?"

"Not especially," I said. "I feel great just being here." I wanted to add "with you," but choked it off.

"Well, I think you're going to have one, anyhow," Bea said. "Mr. Cobb—he lives next door—asked me to come in for a cocktail, and I've about decided to drag you along."

"It's okay with me," said I. "I'm easily led."

So, while she collected the beach-robe, the sun-glasses, the book and all the other paraphernalia that women take to a beach, I took down the umbrella. We transported this material to the porch of the cottage where Bea told me to wait for her.

"I'd introduce you to Aunt Edith," she said, almost apologetically. "But she's unseeable. Aunt Edith naps practically all afternoon."

"God bless Aunt Edith!" I thought.

Bea was with me again in two shakes. She'd changed the yellow bathing-suit and espadrilles for summery blue linen and white sandals, and lost nothing by the change. The woman could have worn gunnysacking and still found favor with Mrs. Morgan's boy.

"Who," I asked, as we started, "is this host that has a blind date with me?"

"We are rather informal down here, aren't we?" Bea said. "But to put you straight, his name is James Ray Cobb. You probably saw his house as you came in to ours."

"I remember it," I said. "An abode of the quality."

"I guess Mr. Cobb is pretty rich," said Bea. "But he doesn't let it prey on his mind."

"Reminds me of my ninety-ninth cousin," I said. "Old J. P. To look at the guy, you wouldn't think he had a dime."

"Trading on your name, are you?" Bea said, and took my arm with an altogether delightful gesture. "This way."

SO that's how it came about that presently, on a wide and cool veranda overlooking the Gulf, I was shaking hands with Mr. James Ray Cobb. And James Ray had a good handshake, the kind that leaves your fingers tingling and your heart warming.

He was in the middle fifties, I guess, short, but with wide powerful shoulders. His face was florid, and there were little crimson lines crisscrossing his cheekbones. He had light-blue, very penetrating eyes. He wore a white

stock and a camel's-hair sports-jacket. He looked like a guy that had taken the world between his two big hands and bent it, the way he wanted it to bend.

"I'm very glad Bea brought you along, Mr. Morgan," he said cordially.

"It's nice for me, too," I replied, and turned from him, because Bea Westfall was pulling my arm, to meet Mrs. Cobb.

Mrs. Cobb had just stepped out onto the veranda. She was a distinct shock. I mean, after meeting her husband.

In fact, it was hard to believe that this sharp-featured faded woman was actually the wife of an electric sort of guy like Cobb. She seemed too old, too generally disinterested in life. She was dressed in black right up to her throat, and that didn't gee with the surroundings at all; the blue Gulf, the strip of golden beach, the easy vacation atmosphere of this cool veranda. For my dough, Mrs. Cobb was a dead ringer for the missionary's wife in Somerset Maugham's "Rain." A joy-killer. But she acknowledged the introduction politely enough, murmuring something inaudible. Then she melted into the background.

I doped it as one of those things. Cobb had married early, worked like the devil, made a success of himself, and his wife just hadn't kept up with him. Now here he was, all set for a graceful late middle age, but she still had the mentality of a *hausfrau*. Well, I thought, tough on Cobb, and had no time for further speculation, because a colored manservant in a white coat shoved open the screen door and wheeled out a bar-wagon.

A BIG-TIME bar-wagon it was, too. You could name your poison, and get it. Bea Westfall named hers—a Daiquiri. The white-coated Negro, grinning, expertly obliged. Mrs. Cobb took sherry. Cobb and I had Scotch and soda.

"Nice place you've got here," I said to him, as we leaned against the railing of the veranda.

"It suits me," Cobb said. "Would you like to look around?"

I said I would, and he said it was okay to carry our drinks with us. We went down off the veranda and around to the lawn I'd already noticed.

"There's nothing fancy about it, you understand," Cobb said. "It's just a home for the Missus and me."

Well, so it was, and a very comfortable one. It nudged up against luxury without being ostentatious.

"I was in the wholesale drug-business in Toledo for years," Cobb informed me. "I still am, in a way. But I'm pulling out, gradually. Spend more time down here every year."

"You couldn't find a better place," I said.

"I doubt if I could," he said. "Mrs. Cobb and myself did a fair amount of looking around before we settled on this. California, down in the West Indies, and I don't know where all. But I'm satisfied. Here's the garage."

I followed him down a slight incline in the ground. The garage was a honey, built in under the back of the house. The first things I saw were two noble big cars, a Cadillac and a Packard, shiny and black as a couple of new aces of spades. But they weren't working. The tires of both were off, and the cars were up on blocks.

Cobb looked at them, longingly, I thought.

"It's too bad, isn't it?" he said. "But I've put them up. It's the least I can do. I'm too old to go to war. But if the Government wants people to save gas and tires, I say we ought to save them. So we use that, when we have to." He pointed to a decrepit station-wagon pulled up alongside one of the cars.

Before I could remark that this certainly was a patriotic attitude, there was a noise behind us and a guy entered the garage. He was a thick-set flat-nosed fellow, with something of the look of an ex-prizefighter. A chauffeur's cap was tilted on his head, and he was in shirt-sleeves and dark pants. A pail of water, with a sponge

swimming in it, dangled from one hand. With the other he touched his cap to James Ray Cobb.

"Well, Birdsell," Cobb said, "going to shine her up?"

"Yes sir." The chauffeur set down his pail, squeezed out the sponge and set to work on the rear fender of the station-wagon.

Cobb put a hand on my arm and steered me out of the garage. "Birdsell's no beauty," he said, as if in explanation. "But he's a first-rate driver. He's heartbroken because he can't get his hands on those other cars any more."

I could sympathize with Mr. Birdsell. It was tough to slug an old jalopy around with a couple of beauties like the Packard and the Cadillac going to seed.

"*C'est la guerre*," I said.

Cobb laughed. "That's what I told Birdsell. But it didn't make any impression. I'm afraid his French isn't up to much."

We went back to the veranda then and I took my leave. Bea Westfall walked out to the road with me. It was no part of my plan to say more than *au revoir* to this lovely girl. So, at the road, I came through with a suggestion.

"Look, Bea," I said, "my mother told me I ought to see Tarpon Springs."

"Well, Sandy, always mind your mother. And I think you ought to see it too. It's very quaint, and the people are mostly Greeks. Sponge-fishers, you know."

I grinned. "Mother wouldn't want me associating with a lot of Greeks. Besides, they're tough babies. Look what they did to Mussolini. I'd be scared to go up there alone."

"You poor darling," said Bea. "I wouldn't dream of letting you go alone."

"Just what I was hoping," I said. "When do we take off?"

"Tomorrow afternoon, if you like."

"I like," I said, and went back to the hotel.

Well, it looked as if Morgan, the Great Recuperator, was last getting his time booked up: A midnight swim with a dark and lovely girl. An afternoon date with a light and even lovelier one. "How'm I doing, boss?" I said out loud, waving in the general direction of New York.

At dinner, which I had in the hotel, I didn't see Margo Starr. Evidently her date was elsewhere. So I ate in lonely majesty, sat around the lobby for a few minutes afterward and then went up to my room. I set my little alarm clock for eleven-thirty, just in case I should doze off, and then lay down on the bed.

I did doze off. But the clock brought me up on the dot of eleven-thirty. I climbed into my bathing-trunks and a bathrobe, conscious at once that this was going to be a cold procedure. The breeze drifting in at my windows had a clammy touch to it. It did anything but make the Gulf of Mexico alluring.

But what the devil, I thought. Margo Starr was plenty alluring. And I was the one who had suggested the swim. This was no time to be a sissy.

I had about fifteen minutes to kill, so I got out of my suitcase a bottle of Scotch I'd cracked on the train. I poured a hooker and added water from the tap in the bathroom. Then I sat down on the bed and leaned back against the headboard.

I had the glass at my lips and was just letting the first sip run around my front teeth when there came a kind of pinging whine, and right after it a sudden jar. A bullet plunked into the wall behind me, two inches from my left ear.

I don't know what I thought just then, or if I thought anything at all. But I do know that instinctively I rolled off the bed onto the floor, the glass still in my hand. A little of the drink spilled, and I felt the lukewarm liquid trickling down my chest. I waited a bit. Nothing else happened.

Then I set the drink on the floor, reached up cautiously and doused the light on the table by my bed. That was

a bad moment. The top of my head probably showed briefly, and at the very least, I expected to get a couple of fingers shot away. But I didn't draw another bullet.

CHAPTER THREE



OR the next few minutes, I sat there on the floor in the dark, trying to figure it out. Here I was, miles away from my ordinary routine, in vacation land, and why anyone should take a pop at me I couldn't think. It just didn't make sense. The more I thought about it, the less sense it made.

I guess my mind had been going around in circles for all of five minutes before I remembered the bushy-browed guy who'd acted so funny in the bar. But when I did remember him, I started. That occurrence, of itself, had seemed to mean nothing. But if you tied it up with this—well, maybe I had been a dope to dismiss him so airily.

Even so, that still left a lot of questions. Why had he warned me? And against whom? Why was somebody trying to crease the Morgan scalp with a bullet? And who was it? The only thing I could think was that somebody had me terribly mixed up with somebody else.

In view of all this, it was with no great alacrity that I left the room. I thought of that dark wooden stairway that led down to the court; of the court itself, semi-darkened; of the beach, darker than the two of them put together. And the prospect didn't please.

However, who was I to stand up a flashing brunette? I fumbled around in the dark. I fished my automatic out of a bureau drawer and slipped it into the pocket of my bathrobe. If I got a chance, I thought grimly, I was going to offer this unknown sharpshooter more than passive resistance.

Then I left the room. But the last thing I did before closing the door was to snap on the overhead lights. Because I wanted to see something, and in order to see it, my room had to be illuminated.

Well, I saw, all right, in just a moment. From the top step of that flight of wooden stairs on the outside of the hotel, it was possible to see into my room—for the simple reason that the room was in a wing of the building. And anyone sitting up on the bed, as I had been doing, offered a target.

True, it wasn't an easy shot. The line of fire was on an upward angle. Which, I thought with a shiver, had been a lucky thing for the scion of the Morgans. Because, angle or no angle, the bird who had recently stood where I was standing now had only just missed.

And, of course, he'd had a silencer on his gun. Otherwise the racket would have brought the inmates of the hotel tumbling out, like bees from a hive.

Going across the courtyard to the beach, I kept my eyes darting around and my ears all the way open. But I saw nothing except sliding shadows, and the only sounds were made by the Gulf, and the winds swishing through palm fronds.

I got to the beach in one piece, and found myself still alone. No Margo Starr. Not here, anyhow. Nothing but dank sand and the Gulf of Mexico, black as the ace of spades now, and about as inviting as a Canadian mill-race in January.

I began walking up and down, flapping my arms to keep warm, and conscious of the weight of the revolver in my bathrobe. Presently I became conscious of something else. In the excitement I'd forgotten to bring cigarettes. I flapped my arms some more, in disgust now, and shuffled my feet in the sand. I guess I made too much noise.

Because I hadn't heard a thing when something cold touched my shoulder.

There never has been anything wrong with my heart. Organically, I mean. But if ever there is, I'll date the

trouble from that moment. I froze completely and stiffened like the celebrated ramrod.

"For heaven's sake, Morgan," said a soft gurgling voice, "don't jump so."

I'll bet the breath of relief I exhaled aroused residents of Pensacola. Evidently she had come from behind during my silly arm-flapping, her feet making no noise in the sand.

"Ha," I said, whirling around and gasping a little. "Sneaking up on me, eh?"

Margo was in the lavender beach-robe again. The wind riffled her dark hair. Her eyes were shining, like yellow discs in the gloom.

"Morgan," she laughed, "I do believe you're a scaredy cat."

"You'd be scared too," I said, "if somebody snuck up and touched you with a cold-boiled lobster."

"Well, of all the ungallant remarks. I'll have you know that was my lily-white hand."

"Maybe," I said. "But it had a lobster in it. And another thing! You're late."

Margo was sniffing suspiciously. "I know what's the matter with you, Morgan. You've been drinking."

"Recklessly," I admitted.

"And it's made a beast of you." She shivered suddenly. "But, that aside, I suppose you realize now that you had a foolish idea this afternoon? It's like Greenland out here."

"Well, let's skip it, then."

"We will not," said Margo Starr. "You invited me to go swimming, and swimming I go. If it kills me."

"It will."

"Then we'll die together."

"Okay," I said. "A love-pact."

"Love?" She sturred it. "I'll never love a man who calls me a lobster."

"I did not call—"

But Margo was throwing off her beach-robe. "Last one in's a sissy," she said, and darted for the water.

"That," I said, following reluctantly, "is a hackneyed expression. Motheaten!"

"But calculated to inspire action, Morgan. Ooooh!" She gave a little yell as she hit the Gulf.

It wasn't such a terrible ordeal, though. In fact, back on the beach and toweling myself briskly, I felt a new man. I even felt better about having been vicariously shot at. Then it occurred to me that I hadn't mentioned that little incident to Margo.

I DEBATED doing so and decided against it. Nothing would be gained by telling her. The bare relating of facts, unless I could supply reasons why it happened, would probably sound melodramatic—as if I were trying to make myself the center of a mystery. And certainly Margo wouldn't have the solution to it. I didn't even vaguely toy with the idea that it might have been she who stood on those wooden steps and tried to wing me. That, unless the lady were a homicidal maniac, would have been preposterous.

"Why so quiet and dull all at once, Morgan?" Margo asked.

"I was just wondering," I said, more to make conversation than anything else, "what you do with yourself? I mean, when you're not lending tone to Florida."

She waited a second before replying. "Why shouldn't I be mysterious now?" she said at last. "The way you were when I asked you what you did for a living? But I won't be. I'm on the stage, Morgan."

"Well, well!" I grinned at her. "I've always wanted to meet a real live actress."

Margo laughed. "You may have met a real live ham. You see, the last part I had was in a road show. And it was not a financial success. But definitely not. It hit the rocks, with a thump, in Atlanta, Georgia. And since

I was that close to Florida, I decided to treat myself to a vacation. I've been here two weeks. And I'll stay two more, unless my agent up in New York comes to life and gets me another part."

"Heaven forbid!" I said. "What'll I do with my mid-nights if you go?"

She was looking up at me. "You wouldn't kid a girl, would you, Morgan?"

"Not me. I'm really relying on you." Which was partially true. Margo was swell company. But so was—and I thought of her quite suddenly—Bea Westfall. She was swell too, very super-swell. I shook my head. "Morgan," I thought, "watch it. In these circumstances, better men than you have got into a quandary!"

"You're rather a nice guy," Margo was saying. "Not perfect, of course. But for a lad that a girl picked up in the Gulf of Mexico, not too bad."

Somehow, as she spoke, she'd got closer to me. That queer yellow light was still in her eyes. It seemed to dance. I kissed her.

Her lips were full and warm. For a second they clung to mine, almost as if she were kissing me back, and her slim body was pressed close against me. Then, very gently, she pushed me away.

"That," she said in a voice that, all at once, seemed pre-occupied, "can be by way of saying good-night, Morgan."

WELL, I might as well admit it—I didn't want her to go in. I'm over my sophomore days, I hope; but it hasn't often been given me to sojourn in glamorous places, kissing alluring women.

"No," I said, a touch too violently. "That would be a big mistake."

"Anything else," Margo said, still in that preoccupied voice, "might be a bigger one. But I'll stay for one cigarette."

"You won't do that," I told her, "unless you brought cigarettes."

She had, bless her. I dragged the first puff of mine, and it felt marvelous. But Margo was chucking hers away before it was well lighted.

"Morgan," she said, "I'm just plain cold. If I must stay here, I'm at least going to run up the beach and start the circulation again."

"Okay," I said, taking another prodigious drag on the cigarette. "You run, and I'll chase you. It's the satyr in me."

Some satyr I turned out to be. Margo Starr simply left me at the post. She was off like some wild thing before I even started. I plodded after her over the wet sand, conscious that cigarettes and Scotch didn't exactly condition a guy for a pastime like this. Margo kept ahead of me. Her figure was like a dark wraith, and the sand she kicked up stung against my legs. But I wasn't overtaking her—for she flitted and I labored.

And then I got cute. It was a darn' sight easier to run down at the very edge of the water where the sand was smooth and hard. I shot over there and began legging it, figuring to cut to the right directly and head her off.

Well, I cut to the right, all right. And went flat on my face with a sock that must have made all the bygone Morgans wince in their graves!

For a second I lay there, gasping and dizzy. The sand was gritty against my chin. No fooling, I was stunned. As if some guy who knew how had hung one on my jaw.

Then I heard Margo, calling through the darkness: "Morgan, where are you? I can't see a thing."

I pulled myself onto my knees. I'm telling you, *groggy* was the word for Morgan. But I had enough left to answer Margo. "Over here," I yelled. "I took a header."

I heard her footsteps coming toward me. Then, all at once, it occurred to me that no mere sand could have tripped me like that—unless some kid had built a thick bunker here about shin-high.

"Morgan?" Margo was pretty close now.

I reached back, let my hand fumble around. The hand touched something warm and yet not warm, if you get me.

"God Almighty," I exclaimed, and ran my fingers over the thing.

There was no getting away from it. It was a body. A very inert, very lifeless body lying within ten feet of the inquisitive but spent waves of the Gulf of Mexico.

I tried to keep cool and collected.

"Let's have those matches of yours," I said to Margo.

"Matches?" She was about five feet away. "Why on earth do you want—Morgan, what is it?" Her voice rose on the last four words.

"I don't know," I said. "Except that we are not alone. Match me."

Her hand came over in the dark, shoved matches into mine. She said sharply: "What goes on, Morgan?"

I didn't reply. I was having a tough time getting a match to stay lit in the wind. But finally I managed to make a decent cup of my hands and got a tiny flare.

I lowered it close to the head of the body. Margo was leaning over my shoulder. I could feel her breath, soft and warm on my cheek. For an instant, before the wind snuffed it out, the feeble yellow light swept over a face. And I jumped.

The dead man was the bushy-browed guy from the bar and grill.

That was all I had time to learn. Because Margo Starr let out a sudden shrill scream and promptly went into hysterics.

"Here," I began, shaking her. "This won't—" I stopped. Something was whisking along in the darkness. It passed quite close to us.

Well, I am aware that a job like mine calls for iron nerves, cool judgment and headwork. I exhibited none of those things just then. But picture it! There was I on a dark beach with a dead body, an hysterical woman and somebody running like hell away from the scene. I didn't stop to think. But, later on, I did remember having been conscious of something wrong, or out of place, as I bounded up and took after the running thing.

My guess is that I surprised the runner. But not enough. I think he'd slowed, not expecting pursuit. But when I came charging across the beach, he quickly resumed speed. I heard a flurry of sand being kicked up and a peculiar dry cough. And that was all—the thing simply vanished.

I couldn't follow it. I could hardly see my hand in front of my face. Anyhow, it was dopey to have given chase at all. If the person had shot, there'd have been another guy stretched out in the sand. Morgan, by name.

Right there another scream drove everything else out of my mind. I raced back to Margo. Nothing had happened to her except that she'd begun to laugh and sob by turn, in a queer crazy voice. I grabbed her shoulders and shook her hard.

"Listen," I said. "Snap out of it."

Her head rolled from side to side and finally came down on my shoulder. Her hair was fragrant. For a second she stood there, crying into my bathrobe. Then, with a big effort, she pulled herself together.

"Oh, M-Morgan," she said shakily. "This is awful. I—I'm sorry I kind of col—collapsed. But it was a shock."

Well, it was all of that. But I hadn't expected Margo Starr to go to pieces on me. She'd seemed like a pretty self-possessed lady whom nothing could faze. Still, stumbling upon dead men is likely to do things to the nerves.

I got her calmed down and then, cupping more matches, I had another look at Bushy Brows. He'd been shot once, neatly, above the left temple. Once had been enough.

"W—what are you going to do, Morgan?" Margo asked.

"Take you inside," I told her. "Then report this to the police."

I did just that. I walked her into the hotel via the back entrance and sent her upstairs. The night clerk was be-

hind the desk, sleeping with his mouth open. I brought him out of that in a hurry. When he heard what I had to say he fell over himself getting to the switchboard.

Considering the time of night, the police were pretty prompt. On the way to the beach, I gave them the facts. Then I showed them the body. And, after I'd answered a few questions, they let me go.

CHAPTER FOUR

BACK in my room, which I reached through the hotel proper, I shut the window that gave on those outside stairs and pulled down the shade. I was taking no more chances that night. Then I looked at my alarm clock.

Two A.M. A fine rest I was getting, all right! I went over to the bureau where I'd left the Scotch. At this point, I thought, another drink wouldn't mean one thing or the other. But, hand around the neck of the bottle, I paused.

I am not particularly orderly about my possessions. But I do have kind of an orderly mind. I knew at once that something was wrong with the top of my bureau.

It took a minute to figure it out. Then I remembered.

When I'd got undressed and set my alarm clock earlier, I had taken some papers out of my pocket and weighted them down with the clock. The papers—unimportant ones—were still there. So was the clock. Only the clock was no longer on top of the papers. It stood a couple of inches away.

I knew darn well I hadn't touched that clock after setting it. Obviously, while I'd been mucking around on the beach and falling over dead men, someone had been in my room. I had a quick look through my things. But nothing else appeared to have been disturbed.

I collapsed into a chair, taking the Scotch with me. I was tired and perplexed. What was going on here? And who was so disconcertingly interested in me? A nip of the Scotch was nice, but it didn't answer either of those.

Finally I got up and thrust my hand into the pocket of my bathrobe, intending to replace my gun in the bureau drawer. And I didn't have any gun.

That gave me quite a turn. Until I considered that I'd been racing all over the beach. Naturally, the gun had fallen out of the wide pocket of my robe. You'd have thought, of course, that I'd have gone for it when I began chasing that dark thing. No doubt I did, instinctively. Which was why I'd had a vague presentiment that all was not as it should be. Subconsciously, perhaps, I'd missed the gun. But Margo's hysterics, plus the excitement of finding a dead man and the sudden knowledge of an interloper, had had me slightly confused. But slightly.

Anyhow, I didn't want a gun belonging to me found out there in the proximity of the deceased. So downstairs I traipsed again. I borrowed a flashlight from the night clerk, without telling him why I wanted it, and returned to the beach.

When I got there I found that the medical examiner had arrived, made his pronouncement, and they were about to cart Bushy Brows away.

"Who was he?" I asked one of the cops.

"Search me." The cop shrugged. "He didn't have nothing to identify him."

I bummed around till they cleared out, then I searched the beach. For half an hour. I didn't find my gun.

I didn't like it, not at all. Ten to one the cops had picked it up. They could trace its ownership easily enough. And if the bullet that finished the gent with the eyebrows were the same as the kind used for my gun, I might have a bit of explaining ahead of me.

But there was nothing I could do about it now. I went back to my room and to bed.

Next morning I got up to find that the shenanigans I'd been party to hadn't disturbed the climate and the flora of Florida. The sun was coming down like golden liquid poured out of a bottle; the palms had begun to fan themselves for the day; the petunias were like dwarf ladies in colorful morning frocks. I went over to Brightwater for the purpose of hiring a car.

I was looking over the dealer's stock of drive-it-yourselfs when I came across a regular museum piece. It was an antiquated Ford, built high off the ground, painted a sickly green and without a top of any kind. For a gag, I hired it.

That afternoon I drove it proudly up to Mandalay Cottage. Bea Westfall was waiting for me, in something yellow and summery, and looking like Morgenthau's idea of money. When she saw the jalopy, she put a hand to her head and reeled.

"Heavens, Sandy," she said, awed. "Where did you dig this up?"

"It's the one they used to bring the good news from Aix to Ghent," I told her. "Hop in."

"It looks like a tumbrel," Bea said.

"It rides like one," I said. "Good for us, though. We Americans have grown soft."

"I," said Bea, "doubt the ability of this car to get to Tarpon Springs and back."

"They doubted Columbus," I said. "In you go, lady."

We chugged off, looking like something gay and sportive from the year 1907. With the motor wheezing asthmatically we took the Drive where resides the quality, made a left turn at the bank and began rattletapping toward Tarpon Springs. On our right was a railroad track and to the left lay the Gulf, winking at us with a sleepy greenish-blue eye. I felt peaceful and inclined to forget all the recent mysterious goings-on. And why wouldn't I, zipping at all of thirty per over a good road with America's Number One blonde just to starboard of me? For my dough, the Lord was in His heaven and the world okay. . . .

It wasn't a long drive. Too soon, in fact, we were entering Tarpon Springs via the wide main drag that is paved with red bricks.

We hadn't been part of this community five minutes before Bea whipped me into a church to see some Innes paintings that are hung there. I tried to get a rain-check on this, but no soap.

"Listen," I said, "I can't be taking time out from looking at you to look at paintings."

"You're sweet, Sandy," Bea laughed at me out of blue eyes as big as quarters. "But I'm in charge of your cultural life today. You're seeing the pictures."

Afterward I was glad I had. I am no judge, but the paintings looked wonderful to me. I made a mental note to write my boss that I'd seen them. He'd approve of my spending my time that way. But I wouldn't add that I'd gone in for art with a gorgeous blonde hanging on my arm.

AFTER that, Bea showed me Tarpon Springs. I got a bang out of going to the inlet from the Gulf where the sponge-fishing boats go in and out. There were a number of these boats tied up at the wharf; squat, stoutly-built vessels, each with oxygen tanks and the apparatus for pumping air down to the divers. Some of the boats were festooned with gay little flags, as if they'd just come in from a regatta. And most of them had the little Greek cross on the mast.

From the wharf Bea steered me into the curio shops. But she was a merciful girl. She didn't keep me teetering around for hours while she pawed over the junk that was for sale. Just whisked me in and out of a few of them.

In fact, I did more lingering than she. The shops were presided over by pretty nifty-looking Greek numbers and I let these black-eyed susans part me from some of my hard-earned dough. Over her protests, I bought Bea a hand-woven basket all colors of the rainbow, a shell necklace, a

charm bracelet featuring **marine life** and a tortoise-shell cigarette-case. And I wanted to send Chick Chickering a cute baby alligator, fifteen inches long, but Bea cracked down on this notion. Chick, she said, would forget to feed the beast and, in retaliation, it would grow up and devour him. I said that was the idea I'd had in mind.

"No alligators," said Bea firmly, marching me out of the shop. "But do you like shrimps, Sandy?"

"Well," I said, "I wouldn't exactly call you a shrimp. I'd have said—"

"Imbecile! I'm referring to *bona-fide* crustaceans."

"Oh, them," I said. "Sure. Lead me on."

Lead me she did, into what I might call a shrimpery operated by one Louis Pappas. It wasn't the kind of a place you'd confuse with the Ritz. But the things Louis Pappas knows about dishing up fried shrimps the Ritz doesn't know, I'll bet.

The shrimps were fried in olive oil and I have yet to taste anything more delicious. With them went a salad featured by cheese made from goats' milk which, for the first time in my life, endeared me to goats. We helped these comestibles down with a couple bottles of Budweiser.

"Yum," I said, at the end of all this.

"Yum, yum," said Bea. "There's nothing wrong with your appetite, Sandy."

"If you," I said, "could only cook like Louis Pappas."

"Well, I can cook," said Bea defensively. "And good, too."

"I'll keep it in mind," I said. "It's a point in your favor."

"Egotist," Bea murmured.

OUTSIDE in the street we got a slight shock. The day had been good before, except for a slight haze over the Gulf. But now the haze had blackened. And the clouds were rolling in, toward land. It looked as if storm and dusk were going to hit Florida simultaneously.

"Sandy," said Bea, glancing a little nervously at the sky, "we're going home. And quick."

The Ford of antiquity I'd hired brooded at the curb. I got a wheezy response from the engine and we took off. As we lumbered out of Tarpon Springs a bunch of little Greek kids at the roadside gave us the ha-ha. It seemed that they didn't properly appreciate my green museum piece. In fact, the Greeks had a bird for it.

The sky was really lowering now. A nasty wind bent the trees. It grew darker by the second. And there were moments, between puffs of wind, when a kind of ominous calm prevailed.

"We'll never make it, Sandy," Bea said. "We'll have to take shelter."

"Nonsense—" I began, and stopped.

A big squashy drop hit the windshield. Another and another. Then, no fooling, the rains came.

They came like nothing I've ever seen before. It was as if a bucket brigade of giants were astride the world trying to put out all the fires here below. I mean, sheets of water, carried along on the wind. In two seconds Bea and I looked like a couple of oft-dunked doughnuts.

"I could murder you, Sandy Morgan," Bea yelled. She had to yell over the wind. "Bringing me out in a car that hasn't even got a top."

"It was a test case," I yelled back. "I wanted to see how you'd look with rouge, lipstick and mascara all meeting on the point of your chin. Well, I see. The answer is, swell."

"Goon," shrieked Bea. "Monumental goon!"

I was squinting down the road. I couldn't see much because the dusk was fading fast and the rain was blinding. But there wasn't a sign of a shelter. Nothing but fields on either side of us and dead ahead, swift-forming puddles. And suddenly, like a curtain rung down, a purple-and-black darkness fell. I flicked on the lights. But they didn't help much.

This, I thought, was not so good. A moment before, driving had been uncomfortable. Now it was downright dangerous.

Bea must have felt the same thing; she touched my arm. "Take the next right turn, if you can see it," she said. "I know a place we can go."

I didn't argue. I managed to find the turn and took it. The car began slopping along in the direction of the Gulf. And, presently, I was aware that this side road ended at a large dark building. I ran the car straight up to it. There was a kind of portico thing and under this I stopped.

"Well, here we are," I said. "What is it, Sans Souci or Mon Repos?"

"This," Bea told me, delicately wiping her face with a handkerchief the size of a postage stamp, "is an abandoned hotel. It was built during the Florida boom and the boom went boom before it really began to operate. So they just walked off and left it. It was to be called 'Headwinds House,' I believe."

"Well," I said, "you're smart to know about it. We're snug here."

This was not strictly the truth. We were, of course, comparatively sheltered. But the wind came slashing under the portico and bringing rain in with it. And, aside from the windshield behind which we crouched, that nutty car offered no protection at all.

"Try," I said to Bea, "to visualize a big old-fashioned fireplace. The logs are snapping and crackling. On the hearth is a trivet, shining—"

She stopped me with the healthiest sneeze I've ever heard a lovely lady loose off. Following that, she shivered, definitely.

"Here," I said. "This won't do. You're not going to get a cold because I was dope enough to hire only half an automobile. We're busting into this place."

We didn't have to bust in. The door was open and we entered what obviously had been designed as a lobby. It was pitch-black. You got a vague impression of standing in a high-ceilinged and gloomy vault. I lit matches to see if they'd left any properties in the place. They hadn't. There was nothing but space and bare floor. But, at least, we were out of the wet.

"Homelike, isn't it?" I said.

"Oh, Sandy!" Bea kind of wailed. "I hope I'm a good sport. But I don't feel so—so cheerful about now."

TELL you the truth, I didn't either. The inside of this forsaken hotel was like a crypt. Damp, draughty, musty. And Bea and I were soaked to the skin. Every time she took a step her shoes made a squashy sound. So did mine.

Bea sneezed again and I took off my coat and tried to wrap it around her. But she made me put it back on.

"Don't worry about me, Sandy," she said. "I throw off colds in no time. But give me a cigarette, please."

I lit one for her. "Tell me about this place," I said.

"I have told you about all I know," said Bea. "Except that they had very grandiose plans for it. They were going to cater to the rich and it was to be awfully expensive. And—you couldn't see as we came in, of course—but the location is wonderful. It's on a little inlet and they built a very good dock—the idea being that yachts and sailing-parties from all over the west coast would come in here. But it turned out to be just a dream. I understand that the owners lost a fortune on the place."

Outside the wind still howled and we could hear the rain lashing against the windows of the hotel.

"How long do these storms usually last?" I asked.

Bea said she was surprised that this one had lasted as long as it had. These quick Florida rains usually struck with tropical violence, but soon spent themselves.

Lighting matches, I went over to a window that I judged looked out upon the little inlet and, thence, upon the Gulf. The glass was broken in half a dozen places and

rain was streaming in. I couldn't see a thing outside. The darkness was solid, as if some huge black shape had been shoved up against the window.

And then, as I turned away, I heard something.

Because the wind was wailing and whining, I couldn't properly categorize the sound; but it seemed to me like a kind of shuffling.

I STOPPED abruptly, straining my ears. But I heard nothing more. Only the wind and the tattoo of the rain against the building. I crossed back to Bea. "Did you move a second ago?" I said, in a sharp whisper. "Move? Why, no. . . . Sandy, what's the matter?"

"Nothing," I said. "Don't talk for a moment."

The words hadn't left my lips before I heard it again. This time I couldn't mistake it. A light shuffling footstep that seemed to come from somewhere off the lobby. Instantly Bea Westfall's nails cut hard into my arm.

"Sandy!" Her voice was tense, vibrant, like a banjo string just plucked. "There's someone else here."

"You're dreaming," I said, with some notion of keeping her calm. "Who'd be in a place like this?"

"I heard a definite noise and I know you did too," Bea whispered, her mouth close to my ear. "Listen!"

We listened. The sound wasn't repeated.

"Just to show you how wrong you are," I said, and a good deal of it was sheer bravado, "I'm going to investigate." I lit a match and started across the lobby.

Both of Bea's hands grabbed my shoulders and pulled me back so hard that I nearly fell over.

"You'll do nothing of the sort. Don't you realize that, if someone is there, he'd have all the advantage over you. You wouldn't have a chance. And if you were knocked out or—something, what about me?"

I hesitated. There was sense in what she said. Nobody but a dope would have gone blundering around here lighting matches and with not so much as a pocket-knife to protect himself. Alone I might have tried it, because I hope I've got my share of personal courage, or foolhardiness. Nevertheless, it would still have been dopey. And with Bea here, it was out of the question.

"All right," I said, a little reluctantly.

"Furthermore," Bea said, "we're getting out of here right now, rain or no rain."

We got out to less rain. The storm hadn't stopped entirely. But the wind had died somewhat and the rain was thinning to a drizzle. I said a silent prayer over the Ford and it was answered. The mechanism coughed a few times, but started.

"Who on earth do you suppose was in there, Sandy?" Bea asked, as we got back onto the main road. She still sounded nervous.

"Granting there was anybody at all," I said, "some tramp, no doubt. Taking refuge, the same as we were."

"Well, anyhow,"—she squeezed my arm,— "I'm glad I didn't let you investigate. You might have had your head smashed."

It was something, I thought, that Bea Westfall didn't want the Morgan head, negligible though it was, smashed.

I pushed the little car as fast as it would go. Bea needed nothing so much as a hot bath, a hot toddy, a shot of aspirin and bed. And I could have done with the same. I stepped on it, wishing to the Lord I'd had the sense to hire a car that would really travel.

However, we didn't have far to go. Very soon we were approaching Dunedin Isles. Then, about half a mile short of the road that turns off to the golf course, I became aware of a light flickering in my driving-mirror. Some fellow was coming up from behind, and coming fast.

I pulled over as far as I dared. The road was slippery and not very wide just here. And I wanted to give him plenty of room.

The lights in back moved up, played full on my mirror for a second, then seemed to fall away. I didn't pay much

attention to them. I was concentrating on driving, being very close to the edge of the road. Once, in fact, my right side tires slipped off it and grated along on gravel. But, all at once, there weren't any lights behind me. The car in back had evidently turned off somewhere.

I was just pulling back toward the middle of the road when there came a sudden rushing, whooshing sound. I heard a crash of metal, my crazy little Ford seemed to shake from one end to the other and Bea Westfall screamed. The next instant it was as if we were flying through space, with the world turned upside down.

I had about a fraction of a second in which to do something. I let go of the wheel and grabbed Bea, with some vague idea of keeping her from being thrown out of the car. But something socked me. All the colors of the rainbow seemed to run together in my brain and then the weird bright mass exploded—and everything blacked out.

CHAPTER FIVE

I CAME to very slowly, with the sensation of having to fight my way back out of shadows. There was something soft under my head and I just let myself rest against it. My face felt both hot and cold. That seemed odd until, with my eyes still closed, I put my hand up to it. Rain caused the cold feeling. Something thicker accounted for the other. My head was bleeding.

Then Bea Westfall's voice brought me further out of the fog. "Sandy! Are you all right, Sandy?"

I shifted and found that the soft thing behind my head was her shoulder. And she was holding a rain-sopped handkerchief against my forehead, trying to stop the blood.

"I—I guess so," I mumbled. "My head hurts awfully, though. How about you?"

"Not a scratch," said Bea. "Except that I've twisted my ankle."

"What the devil happened?" I said.

"A hit-and-run driver, Sandy." Bea was positive. "I wasn't knocked out. Just sort of stunned for a moment. But I know that other car didn't even slow down because, just dimly, I heard it go on. I didn't stop to think about it then. I was crawling over to you, with my heart in my mouth. Because I thought you were dead, Sandy. Thank God you aren't."

Well, thank God that she thanked God.

"And," said Bea, "I'll tell you something else: It's a good thing our car didn't have a top. If it had been a sedan, we might have been pinned in it when it turned over. As it was, we were thrown clear. I lit right on top of you, Sandy, and that's why I wasn't completely knocked out, I guess. I seem, though, to have knocked you out pretty thoroughly. By the way, the car's a wreck."

I got up carefully. I felt as if I'd been kicked by a horse. For a second I stood there, dizzy as a coot, with all Florida spinning around in front of my eyes. But, after a little, things righted. I decided I'd live.

"Can you walk on that ankle?" I said to Bea.

"A purist," Bea said, "would call it hobbling."

She hobbled, all right, and I suspected a sprain. I helped her back to the road where we had the luck to flag a truck almost immediately. The driver was a good guy. He took us straight into the center of Brightwater, and we went out to the hospital in a taxi.

Bea did have a sprained ankle, but it wasn't bad. A day or two off it ought to do the trick, the doctor said. As for me, I had to have a couple of stitches taken in a gash over my temple. The doc sent me forth again festooned with a neat bandage right around my head.

"Well," said Bea, in the taxi going over to Brightwater Beach, "you've given me quite a day, Mr. Morgan. Never a dull moment."

"Yeah," I said. "And if ever I get my hands on the guy that ticked our fender and ran away, I'll give him a moment. His last."

This time, maybe because somebody else was driving, I managed to deliver Bea home safely. I took the taxi back to the hotel. I'd had some idea of changing my room that night, in case my unknown sharpshooter pal decided to walk abroad again. But when I got in, I was too tired to bother. I just yanked down the window shades, took a big swig of Scotch and got into a hot bath.

And though I'm not overly religious, I said a prayer that night. A prayer of thanksgiving. Because—and I realized it very suddenly—if anything had happened to Bea Westfall out on that dark road, a lot of the lights in this world would have gone out for Sandy Morgan. . . .

Next morning I ran into Margo Starr right after breakfast. I was still wearing the bandage on my head.

"My heavens!" she exclaimed. "Have you been in more trouble?"

"I fell," I told her. It was weak, but there wasn't any point in going into the long story of what had happened at that deserted hotel, Headwinds House, and afterward. And, actually, Margo didn't seem violently interested in my head. She had something else on her mind.

"Look, Morgan," she said. "There'll be an inquest on that—that body we found, won't there?"

"I expect so."

"Well, will I have to appear?"

I considered. "I don't see why," I said, at last. "I didn't tell the cops anything about you. Just said I'd gone for a night swim. So far as I know, nobody knows you were within a mile of the guy."

She looked relieved. "Thanks, Morgan, for not dragging me into it. It would have been sort of—of unpleasant." She switched the subject: "By the way, you walked out on me yesterday, didn't you?"

"Me?" I said. "I wouldn't do a thing like that. I just didn't see you around."

"So!" Her black eyes were laughing at me. "My guess is you went and got yourself another gal. What did you say to her, Morgan, that made her hit you on the head?"

"You're crazy," I said. "I spent yesterday in the Carnegie Library."

"I see. You fell and bumped your head on the Encyclopedia Britannica. That explains everything."

"I'm not in the mood for comedy," I said. "Would you like to go over to town?"

"Much as I adore you, Morgan," Margo said, "not this morning. I've some letters to write."

So I went alone in the bus, reflecting that a fellow who tries to rush two girls at once always has questions to answer. In town I looked up the Drive-It-Yourself chap, told him what had happened, and paid for the green Ford.

He was a very nice fellow. He let me off easy.

"I oughtn't take anything for that car," he said. "It was ready for the junk pile. But you reported the accident to the police, didn't you, Mr. Morgan?"

I said no. What was the use, I said? We hadn't the ghost of a description of the other car. And by now, it was probably in Key West or somewhere.

"You'd ought to report it just the same," the garage man said. "You never know."

He was right, of course. The police did pretty wonderful work in tracing down cars. And a flagrant hit-and-runner like the one who'd smacked into us ought to get his. I changed my mind.

Before I left the garage, however, I hired another jalopy. I figured I'd need it. Otherwise how was I going to get out to Mandalay Cottage, frequently?

The new jalopy was more car and less relic than the Ford had been. I drove it over to the local police station and spoke my piece.

"Having a bit of excitement down here, aren't you, Mr. Morgan?" the desk-sergeant said, eying me.

"Too much," I grumbled. "I'm supposed to be resting."

He grinned. "Why don't you just stay on the beach?"

"Unh-unh," I said. "When I do that, I fall over bodies."

That seemed to put a thought in the sergeant's head. He handed me a newspaper off the desk. "Seen this yet?" he asked, pointing to an item.

I read that they had identified Bushy Brows. His name had been Thomas J. (Slick) Kyle, a small-time gangster and confidence man who'd operated both in New York and St. Petersburg. Just what Mr. Kyle had been doing in Brightwater, nobody knew. But the write-up intimated that his racket was phony deals with susceptible old people who came to the Gulf coast. So doubtless he'd been here to see a client and, maybe, the client was dissatisfied. . . . Dissatisfied enough to bump him off.

The article mentioned my name, but not my profession and I had the decency of the Brightwater cops to thank for that. It simply said that the body had been found by S. J. Morgan, a guest of the hotel.

At the station-house I learned that the inquest on Kyle was set for the following morning. I'd have to testify, of course.

That being that for the moment, I drove back across the causeway and headed for Mandalay Cottage. It was nearly noon and I thought that Bea must have slept off most of the shock of the previous night by now.

She had. She looked fresh as a flower at dawn. She was stretched out in a deck-chair, no shoe on her right foot and the ankle very much strapped up. But—and I swore silently—she wasn't alone.

Aunt Edith, whom I'd met for just a second the night before, was there, fussing over Bea like a middle-aged hen. I might have been able to cope with Aunt Edith. But James Ray Cobb and his doleful-looking wife were likewise present.

Bea gave me her hand. "Sandy, how nice of you to come! How's the head?"

"Mending," I said. "How's the ankle?"

"Oh, not so bad. A little stiff."

James Ray Cobb spoke. "You young people were lucky. Very lucky."

"I should say so," Aunt Edith said. "You might have been killed outright." She smiled at me. She was a plump pretty woman and she had a nice smile. "I don't know that I'll let Beatrice go driving with you again, Mr. Morgan!"

"Oh, Aunty," Bea said. "What a thing to say! Sandy wasn't doing a thing wrong. That other car just came up out of nowhere."

I hoped, fervently, that Aunt Edith believed this. But she was a dope, if she didn't. As though I'd drive recklessly with a girl like Bea Westfall in my car.

"Bea tells me, Morgan," Cobb said, "that you didn't actually see the other car. That you couldn't describe it."

"That's right," I said. "I saw some lights, they went out and then, all at once, we were turned over. There—" And I stopped.

Why I hadn't considered the possibility before, I'll never know. But those lights had gone out just before we were hit, and I'd thought the other car had turned off. And—the devil! Could it have been that we'd been crashed into intentionally? I thought for a second. No, it didn't make sense. The crack on the head was making me dream up things.

"Yes?" Cobb was saying.

"Well, that's all there is," I said. "We were just spilled out on the side of the road."

"You've told the police, of course."

"Yes. This morning. I hope they get the fellow, but I haven't much hope."

Cobb smacked one big fist into the palm of his other hand. "I hope they get him, too. There's too much of that kind of thing going on. If I had my way, a driver

guilty of leaving an accident would never be permitted to touch a car again."

Aunt Edith clucked, in agreement.

During all this, Mrs. Cobb sat silent. She was a very strange woman, I thought. Her features were sharp, the kind of features you associate with alertness. But she didn't seem alert. Rather, she had a preoccupied, almost sluggish attitude and her eyes were dull and disinterested. Apparently it didn't mean much to her that Bea and I had had a narrow squeak.

Presently the Cobbs got up to go. James Ray dropped one of his big hands gently on Bea's shoulder.

"Well, take care of that ankle, young lady," he said. "Rest is what it needs. If I were your doctor, you wouldn't have gotten out of bed this morning."

His hand lingered on her shoulder. It wasn't, in any sense, a caressing or too-familiar gesture. More like a display of paternal interest. But—maybe I was nuts—but I thought that something flickered behind Mrs. Cobb's opaque eyes.

If it had, it went to confirm my opinion of her. Cobb had obviously progressed far beyond his wife. And, at this late date, there was nothing that Mrs. C. could do about it, save to be mortally jealous of every move he made. But just now she was being a silly old woman. James Ray Cobb was a good deal more than twice Bea Westfall's age.

With a fine display of will-power I refused Bea's invitation to lunch. The Lord knows I wanted to stay. But I thought Bea should rest in the afternoon. She wouldn't if I littered up the premises.

So I went back to the hotel. Around three o'clock, having had a swim, I found a steamer-chair in the courtyard and flopped into it.

The day was sultry, but there was an inshore wind and it was cool under the trees. I closed my eyes, realizing abruptly that I was very tired. In no time, I'd corked off.

CHAPTER SIX

THE gods permitted me to doze for half an hour. Then, dimly, I heard a voice say: "Good afternoon."

I swore under my breath and opened my eyes. There stood that elderly guy, Fordyce, the one Bea had catalogued as a terrific bore.

"Warm, isn't it?" Fordyce continued.

I said it was and hoped he'd beat it. He didn't. For a second he stood as if undecided, then dragged up another steamer-chair and sat down.

Oh, hell, I thought. I lit a cigarette, thinking it might keep me awake. Fordyce refused the smoke I offered him. He just sat there, looking at me with eyes like steel bullets. And, somehow, I got the impression that he wasn't as old as he looked. His hair was graying; his face seamed. But there was a kind of lingering liveness to his body. Once, I imagined, his spare frame had been as steely as his eyes.

"That was a queer thing that happened here on the beach the other night, wasn't it?" he said finally.

"Yes. Seems to be quite a mystery."

Fordyce kept looking at me. Bea was right. You couldn't get away from his eyes.

"I understand you found the body," he said.

I nodded. "And I wish I hadn't. I didn't come here to be mixed up in anything like that."

"Wasn't it a little—er—cold for swimming that night?" Fordyce asked. His tone was casual, but there might have been an undercurrent of insinuation in it.

What the hell, I thought? Was this old fool implying that I had anything to do with the shooting of Mr. Thomas J. (Slick) Kyle?

I said, very civilly: "I'm peculiar, maybe. But I swim any time. I'd go in at night in Labrador."

"H'm." He seemed to brood, never taking his eyes off me. "Mr. Morgan, would you resent a—a slightly personal question?"

I started. I didn't know he knew my name. But then I remembered that it had been in the paper.

"Why should I?" I said, wondering what was coming.

"Well, then," Fordyce said, perfectly calm, "you didn't know this man Kyle, did you?"

"Good Lord, no. What makes you think that?"

"I didn't really think it," he said. "I simply inquired."

Yeah, he'd simply inquired. He was a hatchet-faced old snooper, that was what he was.

"Make your mind easy on that," I said, not too cordially.

"Kyle was a new one on me. A total stranger. Now may I ask you a question?"

Fordyce smiled and I was surprised to find that he had a nice smile.

"Turn about, eh?" he said. "Well, fair enough."

"All right," I said. "Are you interested in this case?" He seemed to consider. At last: "Only casually, Mr. Morgan. As a reader of the newspapers. You see,"—his smile was apologetic now,—"I haven't very much to occupy me down here. When something like this comes up, I—I think about it."

So that was it. An armchair detective. Well, if that was all, okay. I might even have given him more food for thought by telling him about last night's accident. But I decided against it.

What I did say was this, to make my own position absolutely clear: "Well, I'm as much in the dark about this Kyle business as anyone. I think the papers were right. He was a small-time racketeer and got himself murdered because of some shady transaction."

"I guess that's it," Fordyce agreed. He cleared his throat, making a hacking sound. As he did so, something seemed to try and flare up in the back of my brain. "But I mustn't bother you any longer," Fordyce was saying. "Good day, Mr. Morgan. It's been a pleasant chat."

I sat on after he had gone, thinking drowsily. Pleasant chat, eh? All about murder and dead bodies. Mr. Fordyce certainly had a grisly idea about what was pleasant. He— And, very suddenly, the thing that was trying to light up in my brain did light up. Definitely.

That hacking noise he'd made when he cleared his throat. I'd heard it before. I'd heard it when—gosh, when I'd raced after that thing in the dark the other night! The same peculiar dry cough. I was certain of it.

Of course, sitting there in that chair, I told myself that I was dreading. What would that old dodo have been doing on the beach at that hour? Murdering "Slick" Kyle? Unbelievable. Spying on Margo Starr and me? For what reason? Taking a midnight stroll and, inadvertently, being privy to a crime? Well, maybe. But none of it added up.

Morgan, I said to myself, you came here for a Florida rest. But what you're having is a Florida fling. Two girls, and you like both, and a very queer order of monkey-business on the side. Had you sense, you'd go back to New York and to work.

Sure, that was the prescription. But even as I wrote it out in my mind, I knew I'd never follow it.

Then there were these mysterious goings-on. But I didn't give a hoot about them.

IN that connection, however, I did change my room. Now that I'd had time to think it over, I concluded that I'd been a plain fool for staying there as long as I had. If you considered that queer warning from Kyle in the bar and the fact that I'd been shot at, once, and then added the possibility that the hit-and-run business had been no mere accident, it was pretty evident that somebody around Brightwater thought he could do without Morgan. Of course, inexplicable was the word for it all. I certainly couldn't see how I'd gotten in anybody's

hair simply by coming to Florida. But if I had, there was no use giving the unknown party a chance to pop at me again.

So I told the hotel manager that my room was too noisy. He looked at me kind of funny, because noise was something we didn't have much of at the hotel. But I guess that, with him, the customer was always right. He gave me another room on the front, where there was nothing outside the window but God's pure air.

THE inquest next day turned up nothing more than the police already knew. There was a certain amount of formality and palaver. But in the end the coroner's jury brought in the only possible verdict—that of "murder by person or persons unknown."

I had attended the inquest in some trepidation, thinking that my own gun might easily be one of the exhibits. It wasn't. Obviously it hadn't been found by anyone in authority. I came to the conclusion that I'd made a bum search of the beach that night and that some early fisherman, or maybe some kid, had found the gun the following morning and pocketed it. I hoped so, anyway.

As I was walking toward my car after the proceedings were over someone hailed me. I looked up. James Ray Cobb was just parking his old station-wagon at the curb. Alongside of him, a flowered bandana over her bright hair and tied under her chin, sat Bea Westfall. The bandana couldn't hide the fact that she looked wonderful.

"Hello," I said. "You all recovered?"

"Certainly, I am," Bea said. "My ankle's as good as new." She proved it by getting out of the car and walking a few steps. She limped, but very insignificantly.

"Bea came out of that crash very well, Morgan," Mr. Cobb said to me. "I hope you've done the same."

"I'm all right," I said. "What are you on, a shopping tour?"

"Mr. Cobb is going to the post office to buy war bonds," Bea told me gayly. "So I thought I'd come along with him and—oh, just wish I could buy as many as he can. How about you, Sandy? Have you kicked through for your country this week?"

Gee, I hadn't. Not so much as a twenty-five-cent stamp. And I'd vowed a vow in this respect. Now seemed a good time to make good on it, unto the limit of my purse.

"I'll go along," I said. "But I won't be able to keep up with Mr. Cobb."

Nor could I. Cobb backed the Government for a hundred bucks. Paying for the wreck of the green car had put a slight crimp in my exchequer. I could put only a quarter of this amount on the line.

"A very good morning's work," Bea said, on the way out of the post office. "You both deserve a reward. So I think I'll take you back to the cottage for a rum Collins and a swim."

To me that seemed like one of the more pious ideas. I went ahead of them, collected my bathing-trunks at the hotel, and arrived at Mandalay Cottage just as Bea was tinkling the ice in the glasses with a swizzle-stick.

We had the drinks out on the veranda. While we were sipping them, I had a sudden impulse.

It was one of those things and, the instant I got it, I knew I'd never follow it up. Because it went against the grain, me working for the Department and supposed to be able to stand on my own two feet.

Nevertheless, I did have an impulse to confide in James Ray Cobb. To tell him all about the things that had happened to me during my few days in Florida and—yes, and to ask his advice.

You see—well, the way I look at it, no guy is self-sufficient. He can feel pretty young and tough and sure of himself most of the time. But there comes a moment when an element of doubt enters in. Then there's temptation to go to somebody whom you figure is a strong, sane personality and lay the cards on the table, face up.

Maybe, right there, I was being a weak sister. But I'd been bottling up a lot of stuff inside me. And yet, if telling were in order, there seemed an awful lot to tell.

But—and this is why I didn't figure out some excuse to get Bea out of the way and let my hair down completely to James Ray Cobb—it was all so nebulous.

Figure it out! Cobb was a solid no-nonsense citizen. He'd want to know the following, and justifiably: Why hadn't I reported that pot-shot at me to the police? Why hadn't I informed them of the loss of my gun? Why did I not confide to the authorities my vague suspicion about the automobile accident, at the same time touching on that warning I'd had from Kyle in the bar? Furthermore, why hadn't I told the hotel manager the real reason for changing my room, and—

Why—oh, Lord! I shook the impulse to talk to Cobb out of my head. Cobb was big, solid, comfortable. But somehow I couldn't quite decide to unburden myself to him. Because, if you took away the friendly light that flickered out of his blue eyes, he was a pretty formidable-looking man. Not exactly the type that is built for confidences. And at that point, my need was for someone completely sympathetic.

Cobb left presently. And he left, I thought, somewhat to Bea Westfall's disappointment.

"You won't swim with us, James Ray?" she said.

"No," Cobb smiled. "I don't pretend to keep up with you young people. Besides, I've things to do."

"Well, that leaves us, Sandy," Bea said. "I don't suppose you'll walk out on me too?"

Fat chance of that. But the way she spoke gave me to think. Almost as if she were sorry that Cobb had taken a powder. Which—much as I liked him—I wasn't.

I said, answering her question: "Not me. But do you feel up to swimming, with that ankle?"

"Pooh!" Bea said. "I don't know I have an ankle. Come on, and I'll show you where to change."

I was outside again before she was, skipping stones in the driveway between her house and James Ray Cobb's. But, presently, she appeared. Sun-glasses obscured the most notable eyes in Florida and her figure, in the same canary-colored bathing-suit, was like a yellow whip.

"Catch, Sandy!" she said from the end of the veranda, and slung a red-and-white beach ball at me.

But she slung it way over my head. It hit in the driveway behind me, bounded along and began trickling down the incline that led to Cobb's garage.

I chased it, made a pass at it, missed and scraped my nails against loose stones in the driveway. The ball continued down into the garage and, perversely, rolled straight under one of those big black cars that were up on blocks.

I looked around for something to haul it out with, noting, at the same time, that I was alone in the garage. There was a rake hanging up and I took it and went to my knees.

I was just thrusting the rake under the car when, all of a sudden, I stopped. My mouth dropped open, and the rake clattered to the cement of the garage.

CHAPTER SEVEN



ANDY," Bea said curiously, "what on earth's the matter? You haven't said a word for five minutes."

It was true. I'd been sitting in the sand, with my mind spinning. I was still holding the red-and-white beach ball which I'd finally recovered. Now I put it down and faced her. She had to know some time.

"Listen, Bea," I said. "I've just had a shock. It—it looks as if one of Cobb's cars crashed into us the other night."

I spoke too abruptly, guess. Because Bea gave a start and a little cry. Then she stared at me as if I were a raving lunatic.

"Sandy Morgan," she exclaimed, "what are you talking about?"

"I hope I'm wrong," I said. "Because if I'm not, it might be awkward. But the other day, when Cobb showed me over his place, he took me into the garage. And I know for a fact that there wasn't so much as a scratch on either of those beautiful big cars. But now—" I told her.

At the end she sat perfectly still, her face whitening under its coating of sun-bronze.

"But Sandy," she said at last, "that isn't exactly conclusive proof, is it?"

"Maybe not," I said. "But it seems pretty funny."

Bea was silent again. But, suddenly, she got to her feet. Her mouth was a tight line.

"Come on," she said. "We're going to tell James Ray about this."

"My Lord," I said. "That's the last thing to do. Don't you see, he might have been driving the car?"

She shook her head. "That's impossible. I happen to know that both Mr. and Mrs. Cobb went to St. Petersburg that day, on the train. And they didn't get back till very late, long after our accident. Aunt Edith saw them drive up here in a taxi."

Well, that put a different light on the matter. It would be easy, in a small place like Brightwater to check with the taxi driver who had brought the Cobbs over from the station. And if somebody had sneaked one of Cobb's cars out in his absence, I too felt he ought to know of it.

Cobb heard us out. And his face was grim. "I don't like this," he said, eyes narrowed. "To my knowledge, neither of those cars has been driven in over a month. Come with me a moment."

He led the way to the garage and I showed him the thing that had caught my eye. The right front fender of the Packard had been pretty badly crumpled. Someone had tried to hammer it out and the job, while fair, was amateurish. But the banged-up fender in itself wouldn't have made me overly suspicious.

What had given me a jolt was a tiny smudge of green on the lower part of the fender. It was almost infinitesimal and you needed sharp eyes to see it, because it had been ground into the scuffed black paint. The person who had tried to straighten out the fender must have overlooked it in his haste. And our little old Ford had been a sickly green paint-job.

"Of course," I said to Cobb, "I'm not bringing any accusations. But I thought it worth while to show you this."

"Don't apologize, Morgan." He was looking the front of the car over very carefully. "You did right to tell me. This car has been driven without my permission. Look here! And here!"

He pointed. There was a dent in the radiator that I hadn't seen. There was also a dark scrape on the bumper. The damage wasn't great. But a big car like this Packard could have just ticked a light, high-riding Ford and the tick would have been sufficient to knock it off the road. Uneven ground at the roadside might have accounted for our turning over.

Cobb straightened up. His eyes were mere slits. He was keeping control, but I saw that he was furiously angry. And I felt something cold pass along my spine. I wouldn't, I thought, like to have been the guy to cross James Ray Cobb.

"This looks bad, Morgan," he said, in a very level voice. "I'm inclined to believe that you were hit by my car. If so,"—he paused, looking from my face to Bea's,—"*I*—I hardly know what to say. But I am heartily sorry about it. More than that, I feel personally responsible."

"Oh, listen, James Ray," Bea began uncomfortably, "let's forget it. I know perfectly well that you were in

St. Pete. Besides, neither Sandy nor I were hurt much. And—"

Cobb stopped her with a gesture. "We will not forget it, young lady. Do you think I'd allow you and Mr. Morgan to be in an accident caused by one of my cars and do nothing about it? No, I have an idea about this thing. I've been suspicious for some time." He stepped to the door of the garage, went up the incline to the driveway.

"Birdsell!" His voice was a muffled roar.

The tough-looking chauffeur had been clipping a hedge on the far side of the lawn. Presently he shuffled into the garage, behind James Ray Cobb.

"Birdsell, I want the truth," Cobb said, and every word snapped. "Did you have this car out the night of the storm? Yes or no?" Cobb's eyes were little bolts of blue lightning.

Birdsell was trapped and he knew it. He moved his feet awkwardly. He made a weak attempt to deny it. But he couldn't meet Cobb's gimlet gaze.

"Well sir," he said, at length, "I did put the wheels on her and take her out the other night. I figured—"

He got no further. James Ray Cobb simply lit into him. "And for what reason," Cobb concluded, in a shout, "did you dare do such a thing?"

Birdsell was pathetic. Honestly, I felt sorry for the guy. It seemed that he had a girl in Tarpon Springs, probably one of those cute little Greeks. And, knowing that the Cobbs planned to be late getting back from St. Pete, he hadn't been able to resist sneaking out the Packard.

As for the accident, he claimed he'd been aware of brushing another car on the way back, during the rain and general bad visibility. But he thought that it had been only a light brush and he'd been afraid to stop. It had never occurred to him that there might have been a serious accident. And, being in no position to be caught joy-riding in his employer's car, he'd simply hurried home and tried to fix the fender himself. He'd been going to watch his chance, slip the car out again and get a professional job done on it. That was Birdsell's story.

Cobb, giving every sign of impatience, let him tell it. Then, fast and hard, he fired Birdsell.

"And when you've packed your things," he snapped, "come and get your pay. I won't have a man like you on the place."

Birdsell's attitude had changed from the abject to the sullen. He glared at Cobb, muttered something and slouched out of the garage.

Cobb seemed to calm down then.

"I owe you people an apology," he said embarrassedly. "I shouldn't have lost my temper. But a thing like that is a criminal offense. Why, you have every reason to prosecute me."

Bea said quickly that such an idea had never entered her head. It was enough for her that the matter had been cleared up and the guilty party punished. I agreed.

WE had our be' I swim then; after it, I started back to the ho On the way I overtook old Fordyce, footing it along the road. I offered him a lift and when we got to the bar where I'd had my brief encounter with the now-deceased Slick Kyle, Fordyce asked me to have a beer with him. I accepted.

As usual, Fordyce didn't say much. For a good five minutes he sipped his beer, his penetrating eyes fixed on nothing in particular. But, all of a sudden, he surprised me by inquiring: "What was all the rumpus at the Cobbs awhile ago?"

"Rumpus?" I hesitated. How the devil did Fordyce know that anything had happened?

He seemed to sense that his question needed an explanation. "I happened to be passing along the beach in front of Cobb's house and I heard some shouting. It sounded like an argument. You were at the Westfalls. I thought you might have heard it too."

I debated a second. Why should I pamper the curiosity of this old busybody? But if I didn't, he might conclude that Cobb and his wife had been having a brannigan and, for all I knew, spread gossip around. Besides, it couldn't do any harm to tell him the truth.

"I had a ringside seat," I said, and gave him the whole story of our trip to Tarpon Springs including the subsequent auto smash-up.

He listened in silence and there was a look in his eyes that I couldn't fathom. Surprise? Annoyance? Apprehension, maybe? I didn't know. Finally he said, with no change of expression: "It seems to me, young man, that you'd do better to stay in nights."

"Maybe you've got something there," I said. But, at the same time, I was annoyed. Of all the nerve! Who was this old geezer to hand me advice? And to pump me for information? It had happened twice now and darned if there was going to be a third time. I made up my mind to duck Fordyce in the future.

THAT, strangely enough, seemed to be a tough job. In the next couple of days I was forever running into him. On the beach at the hotel, on the road, over in Brightwater, everywhere. I asked myself, was it Fate or had the guy taken a shine to me? And I didn't know the answer. I was civil enough to him, but I didn't let him buttonhole me for any more talks.

And then I did two dopey things, all in the space of a few hours: (1) I proposed to Bea Westfall at the wrong time; (2) I took Margo Starr dancing.

Leave it to Morgan! The gods were dreaming up a clear white night to be presided over by a lemon-colored moon. They were distilling champagne and attars of flowers, figuring to pour it over this magical night. And, as if this weren't sufficiently heady, they planned to throw in enough of the scent of orange blossoms to make a wonderful girl like Bea Westfall lose control momentarily and yes a mug like Morgan. That is, if Bea Westfall and Morgan had been standing beside the silver-and-black Gulf or in the shadow of some giant live oak bearded with moss, as the fella says.

But did I wait for the night and its subtle enchantments? Nope. Not Morgan. I proposed to Bea Westfall on an orange-colored bench at high noon in the middle of Brightwater, in full view of the village loafers and various folk engaged in trade.

I have but one thing to say in extenuation of this idiocy. I didn't lead Bea to the bench. She was there first. I found her, surrounded by bags and bundles, as I came ambling along the street.

"Well, well," I said, "what goes on? You look like a little lost child."

"Sandy," Bea said, "I'm just a little tired child. Did you ever go shopping with Aunt Edith? Well, don't. She's indefatigable."

I dropped down on the bench. "Where is Aunt Edith now?" I asked.

"Somewhere in the shops," Bea sighed. "Buying things she doesn't need. I simply gave out. I'm waiting for her."

"I'll help you wait," I said.

Bea didn't seem inclined to talk. I should have seen that the girl really was tired, probably due to traipsing over town on her still-wonky ankle. I should have seen and kept my mouth shut. But I didn't. Instead, I tried to make sprightly conversation.

"Bea," I said, "I'm glad I met you. Because I've been thinking about you all morning. In—in connection with a little trip I'm making to New York."

"To New York? Oh, I see. You mean your vacation is nearly over."

"That's right," I said, and waited.

Bea leaned back and closed her eyes. "I'll be sorry when you have to go, Sandy. It's been fun."

"It's been nice knowing you, too," I said. "I'll often wish I'd inherited the hay, feed and grain store in Winkona, Wisconsin."

"Are you by chance implying," said Bea, eyes still closed, "that Winkona is a whistle-stop?"

"No, no," I said hastily. "I'm not impugning Winkona. No one appreciates the small American town more than I do. But New York has certain definite advantages. You know, museums, art galleries, world-famous shops et al. Then there's something in being at the hub of things. You—"

"Sandy," said Bea, "get a grip on yourself. What are you trying to say?" And she stifled a yawn, delicately, with the back of her hand.

I was conscious that, so far, I hadn't put the ball anywhere near the plate. But it was tough going. Never, I knew now, should I have started this thing in the main drag of Brightwater, with Bea practically in a state of somnolence.

"I mean," I said desperately, "that I consider you an extremely estimable young woman. I, I hope, am what is known as an eligible young man. That combination, finding itself in a town literally groaning under churches, usually—"

Bea waved a hand, tiredly. "Oh, stop it, Sandy. For heaven's sake, stop it."

I stopped.

She leaned back against the bench with her eyes closed for so long that I thought I had put her to sleep.

"Remember me?" I said at last, unable to stand the strain.

"Listen to me, Sandy," Bea said: "I'm not bragging, but I guess I've had seven or eight proposals, and—"

"Come, come," I said. "This is no time for false modesty. I'll bet it's nearer a good round dozen."

"And," continued Bea, "yours is the worst I've ever listened to. You might have been suggesting that we go clam-digging."

Well, that'll give you a rough idea of Morgan, the Great Lover. I ask a girl to marry me and succeed only in making her think of clams.

"I'm sorry," I said and, believe me, I was sorry for my ill-advised flippancy. "If you think I'm not in dead earnest, you—"

"Here comes Aunt Edith," said Bea. Actually, she sounded relieved.

It was too true. Aunt Edith loomed in the offing, loaded down with bundles like a pack burro.

"Bea, honey," I said quickly, "we've only got a second. You could at least tell me if it's—it's—well, absolutely out."

"I don't know exactly, Sandy." Her blue eyes were curiously veiled. "But I'm afraid so. You see, there's—"

"Somebody back in Winkona?" I supplied. I felt sure there would be.

"Well, yes." She didn't look at me. "Naturally I'm flattered enough to think it over. But—oh, hello, darling! Aren't you about dead?"

CHAPTER EIGHT

ALL afternoon I mooned around, feeling as if I'd made a Grade A fool of myself. But that wasn't the half of it. Far worse than having proposed to Bea Westfall like a college freshman was the fact that Bea was promised to somebody else. Oh, she hadn't said that in so many words. But the implication had been unmistakable. Her "thinking it over" was by way of giving me a slow and easy let-down.

It was a swell afternoon, with Florida at its best. But I'm afraid I didn't appreciate my exotic surroundings. I didn't appreciate them much more when, later on, Margo Starr added color to the scene.

"Morgan," said Margo, without preamble, "I'm fed up." Well, that made two of us. But for different reasons, no doubt.

"I'm just plain bored," Margo went on. "Have you anything to suggest?"

I hadn't, so she made a suggestion herself. She suggested that I take her dancing that night.

My first inclination was to crawl out of it. Because I was in no mood to trip the light fantastic. But I suddenly thought that some kind of diversion might be good for me. I was in a fair way to get broody. And Margo Starr was interesting-looking and amusing.

"Okay," I said. "Why not?"

"You're a life-saver, Morgan," said Margo.

I AM bound to admit Margo was very lovely. She met me in the hotel lobby about nine o'clock, wearing something black that seemed to blend into her gorgeous figure, bringing out all the long graceful lines. Her hair was like a dark crown. She tucked her hand under my arm and informed me that we were going to the Billows, a hotel about halfway between Brightwater and St. Petersburg and right on the water.

The night was clear as a bell. That citrus-fruit moon, for which I certainly should have waited, hung like a yellow disc in a star-powdered sky. It touched the white roofs of the low houses on Brightwater Beach with livid fire. We swung over the causeway, turned right into Harbor Oaks, purring through shadows and flower-scents. Then came Bellaire and the mansions of the rich and great; then Indian Rocks where the road runs like a straightaway for several hundred yards right on a level with the water and makes a sudden sharp left turn at the end. And presently we were zipping along through more open country, with the Gulf sighing and fuming a little distance away from us.

"This was a good idea tonight," Margo said. "I feel better already."

I said "Um." I wasn't just sure how I felt. And then I thought, what the hell? I'd let myself get sunk today and I hadn't come up to the surface yet. The idea of there being an unknown Mr. X in Winkona, Wisconsin, had a lot to do with keeping me under. But what was I going to do? Ruin Margo's evening by being a goon and a sourpuss? I pulled myself together and made a supreme effort to be gay. And with a girl like Margo sitting a wrist-length from me, it didn't have to be any too supreme.

At the Billows I found a space in a small line of cars and eased my jalopy into it. And before I got the motor off and the lights out I was presented with something, free gratis. A kiss from Margo.

I guess it must have been the enchanted night and the moon that made her yield to an impulse. Anyhow, she suddenly leaned over and put her lips on mine. They clung there for a second. They were warm and sweet and Margo Starr was a tops girl. But I couldn't help wishing. I made myself stop wishing. I was still resolved not to gloom this evening.

"That, Morgan," said Margo, with a light laugh, "was for brightening my life. But wipe the lipstick off."

I did that as best I could in the driving-mirror.

Inside we found the dance floor populated but not crowded—due, I suppose, to the gas and tire shortage. Margo ordered Scotch and I strung along with that Champagne might have been more appropriate for a let-us-be-gay program, but I don't go for it. Margo said she didn't either.

I had two drinks in quick succession with a couple of dances sandwiched in between. And I began to feel noticeably better. So, apparently, did Margo. Her eyes were very bright and her voice was low, but animated. And she could dance, like some kind of smooth dream. She put her cheek against mine, closed her eyes and her

feet seemed hardly to touch the floor. I am no Fred Astaire, but dancing with her made me feel like him. She made it that easy.

Everything was proceeding nicely until, between dances, I happened to glance across the room, past Margo's shoulder. In the corner opposite sat Bea Westfall with something that, through a slight Scotch mist, I took to be no less than an admiral.

He was a big guy in a white uniform with plenty of gold braid. Very handsome, too. And Miss Westfall seemed to be having a right good time with him. I didn't care for the way she was smiling and sort of hanging on his words, as the saying goes.

CERTAINLY I didn't care for what happened when suddenly she looked up and saw me. Because the smile left her face as if it had been wiped off. She gave me the briefest of nods.

I had the presence of mind to be puzzled and somewhat worried. I kept my eyes on her a moment. But she didn't look my way again.

"For heaven's sake, Morgan," Margo said presently, "what are you staring at?"

I jerked my eyes back to our own table. "There's a—a friend of mine over there," I said.

"Well, don't ogle her," said Margo. "It isn't polite."

"How do you know it's a girl? You've got your back to her."

"You'd never look at a man that long. Eyes in the boat, Morgan. I'm beginning to feel like a neglected wife."

From there on I was sunk again. I tried not to show it. I ordered another drink and grimly determined to go on having fun. When the music started once more, I abandoned myself to the dance. But, inside me, I was very much upset. There had been something ominous in that little inclination of Bea's head. It was almost like a nod of dismissal.

I stood it as long as I could. But, at a moment when Margo and I were sitting out a dance and Bea and the admiral were doing likewise, I couldn't stand it any longer. I had to know what was wrong.

"Would you mind," I said to Margo, "if I finished this dance with my friend over there?"

She laughed. "Go ahead, darling. You've been dying to dance with her for an hour."

"No such thing," I protested. "This is a duty."

Duty, my eye. I was like a pea on a hot griddle. But I crossed the room with some semblance of dignity, threading my way through the dancers. I was going to find out what was what, no matter if Bea were convoyed by the whole U. S. Navy.

In my day I have had more cordial receptions. Bea's eyes didn't exactly freeze me, but there was definite coolness in them. However, she observed the amenities. She introduced me to the admiral, who turned out to be a lieutenant-commander, and then, rather reluctantly, consented to dance.

"Look," I said, on the floor, "I didn't like to disturb you. But something has obviously slipped. I think I've a right to know what."

"Nothing's wrong, Sandy," said Bea, without a spark of life in her voice. "Not a thing."

"Then I guess I just imagined a chill in the atmosphere," I said.

"I thought I was being extremely polite," said Bea. "After all, I am dancing with you."

"As you would with a lesser member of a leper colony."

"Well," said Bea, "we can always sit down."

I got sore. "Now listen, Beatrice Westfall," I said, "I asked you something today. I may have done it badly, but I meant it, nevertheless. Every word. And if you think I didn't, you're—"

"Do you really want an answer on that?" Bea interrupted softly; I could hardly hear her over the music.

"I do," I said snappishly. "Not only do I want one, but I'm going to get it. Here and now."

Bea drew a breath. "Yes, I think you are. I wouldn't marry you, Sandy Morgan, in exactly one million years." She paused, then corrected herself. "Two million."

I felt myself reel, as if somebody had started one from the floor and exploded it on my jaw.

"But, why?" I said desperately. "Why should you say it like that? What in Heaven's name has happened since . . ."

Right there the music stopped. It stopped finally and refused to go on despite the sporadic handclapping that broke out around the floor.

"Bea—" I persisted.

"Sssh," Bea said quickly, "You're making us conspicuous. Please take me back to my table."

There simply wasn't anything else I could do.

I am afraid that I am a poor cloaker-of-the-emotions. When I got back to our table Margo looked at me penetratingly and asked, "Have a good time, Morgan?"

"Swell," I said, a little thickly.

She laughed. "So I see. Don't you think you need another drink?"

The Lord knows, I did. I had it. And another. During the last one I saw Bea and her lieutenant-commander leave the place. Bea sent not the ghost of a glance in my direction. I gathered that, so far as she was concerned, I was finished. Washed up! But I didn't know why. And I felt sore, abused and disillusioned, all at the same time.

I think I must have behaved very badly in the next half-hour. I honestly tried not to. I tried, inwardly, to laugh it off and recapture a few of my earlier good spirits. But it didn't work. I found myself lapsing into silences which, for the life of me, I couldn't seem to snap out of. And it was then that Margo Starr proved herself a very good egg. She must have known that something had happened. But she didn't inquire or kid me or make a pest of herself. She just gave me my head.

And my head, which on its best day out was never much, led me to propose a drive after we left the Billows.

"I've got a yen to move around," I said, in the car.

Margo was game, but doubtful. "It's rather late, Morgan."

"So what?" I said, and headed for St. Petersburg.

There wasn't anything doing there, but we did have another drink in an all-night joint. Outside again, I decided to go to Tampa. For no good reason. Except that driving, while it didn't settle a thing, helped me keep my mind off that definite—but definite—turndown I'd gotten from Bea Westfall.

"Very well, Morgan," Margo said, getting back into the car. "Tampa, it is. But you're crazy. And it's a sinful waste of gas."

"I've got a tankful," I told her, making a mental note to ask forgiveness of the Lord and Mr. Ickes.

So we went across the bridge to Tampa and cruised around the dimmed-out streets, to no purpose. Neither of us wanted anything more to drink, and by that time I concluded that I was being pretty silly. And that Margo knew it and was simply bearing with it.

At last she said, "Brightwater, Morgan. Remember that place?"

We went back. When we got to the hotel, it was all hours of the night.

I parked out in front, and we started up the walk. But all of a sudden, Margo stopped.

"Morgan," she said.

"Yeah?"

Her eyes, in the queer half-light, were the color of gun-metal. "Nothing very important. Only—just once before I die—I want to have somebody half as much in love with me as you are with that girl."

I was embarrassed. Because now it was very evident that I hadn't been able to keep my feelings from showing

in my face. I said awkwardly: "Forget it. There's no such thing as love."

Margo squeezed my arm. "Oh, yes, there is. Good night, Morgan. And thanks for a lovely evening." With that she left me, very quickly, running up the path and into the hotel.

Up in my room, I realized suddenly that I was dog-tired. I undressed quickly and got into bed. I had a lot to think about, but I refused to think. I cleared my mind. In two minutes I was asleep.

But in another two minutes—or so it seemed—something drilled on my subconscious: something shrill, vibrant, insistent. I came awake with a jerk.

The telephone on my bed-table was ringing great guns. I swore and made a grab for it.

"Hello," I mumbled.

No one answered. I cursed again, out loud this time, and was about to hang up the receiver when a woman's voice said: "Sandy? Sandy Morgan? Is that you?"

"Yes," I said, coming all the way alive. "Yes. This is Morgan."

There was another second of silence. Then the voice seemed to come at me with a rush. But it sounded muffled and indistinct and far away.

"Sandy. It's Bea Westfall. Oh, Sandy, please come quickly. I—I'm in terrible trouble. I—"

There was a gulping sound, and the line went dead.

CHAPTER NINE

ILL bet I set some sort of record for getting into clothes. While I was throwing them on, and then racing out of the hotel past the drowsily astonished night clerk, I was conscious of one paramount emotion—fear. Fear for Bea Westfall's safety.

And yet it seemed incredible that, here in this quiet community, danger should threaten Bea. What could be its nature? What had happened in the few hours since I had seen her at the Billows? And why, above everything, had my mind instantly conceived the idea of some nameless danger, instead of imagining a perfectly ordinary circumstance?

I knew the answer to that last. The telephone call. That choked-off gulp and then the silence, save for the hollow eerie vibration over the dead line. It was precisely as if Bea had been jerked away from the phone in the midst of her call and my brain began conjuring up horrible chimeras. A hand clapped over her mouth; a blow struck sharply on that lovely coppery head; a shot from a gun equipped with a silencer. . . I'm telling you, I went cold all over.

As I bounded into my car, I had a more lucid thought. She hadn't had time to say, or had been prevented from saying, where she was.

Well, where would she be at such an hour? The most likely place was at home and I didn't hesitate. I swung the car out into the road and started for Mandalay Cottage as if all the fiends were gibbering at my rear bumper. To go anywhere else would have been plain silly.

I covered the mile between the hotel and Bea's house in nothing flat. I tore into the driveway, jammed on the brakes and leaped out. And Mandalay Cottage was as dark as pitch.

For a second I stood undecided. I looked over at Cobb's house. It, too, was completely darkened, as why wouldn't it be at almost three o'clock in the morning? Then I ran up on the Westfall veranda and around to the front.

The front door was wide open.

I didn't hesitate any longer. I stepped across the threshold and fumbled for a light-switch.

"Hello!" I shouted. "Bea! Is anybody here?"

There was no answer. Just gloom and shadows. My groping hand found the light-switch.

The instant the lights went up I could see into Bea's bedroom, which was at the front of the house. There was no one in it. The bedcovers were neatly turned down, but the bed hadn't been slept in.

"Bea!" I called again. "Miss Westfall!"

My own voice seemed to come back with a kind of hollow ring and now the cold chills that were racing up my spine became as sharp pricks from the tips of icicles.

I ran back into the hall and started through the house, flinging open doors, lighting lights. The place was in perfect order but apparently deserted. Then, as I approached a closed door at the end of the hall, I smelled that pungent and familiar odor.

It was faint, but unmistakable. Sickly and sweetish, it seemed to be creeping out from under that door. I dashed forward, wrenched at the doorknob. The door flew open. And the fumes of chloroform that rushed to my nostrils almost knocked me down.

I jerked out a handkerchief, clapped it over my nose and rushed into the room. In the half-light seeping in from the hallway I could see a figure lying huddled under bedclothes. There was a cloth over its face. And every one of the room's three windows was tight shut.

I twitched the cloth from the figure's face and flung open the windows all in a couple of frantic movements. Clean night air began pouring into the room. I filled my lungs with it and turned back to the bed.

Bea's Aunt Edith lay in it, breathing heavily.

She wasn't, I saw immediately, very far gone. Evidently, in spite of the heavy smell of the stuff, she'd had only a light dose of chloroform. I lifted her, carried her into Bea's room and laid her on the bed. She muttered something and her eyelids flickered. Ten to one she would be all right, now that decent air was reaching her.

I turned away from the bed, not knowing what to do next. All I knew was that I was scared white. The chloroform confirmed my opinion that some awful devilry was afoot. And Bea wasn't here, wasn't anywhere in the cottage. I—

It reached my ears dimly, a low sliding sound that seemed to come from the back of the house. I paused, listening. And, all at once, a motor roared and I heard a rush and the grinding of tires on gravel. The car was going away, going away fast. And unless my hearing was all off, it had just left the Westfall garage.

I rushed through the house and out by the kitchen door, cursing myself for a fool. I'd walked right past the garage and never thought of looking into it. Due to that oversight, someone—who I felt sure had used chloroform only a few minutes ago—was making an escape.

As I reached the lawn I made a discovery. Whoever had just pulled out of the garage had certainly been in a tearing hurry. Because my car was blocking the driveway. And the car from the garage had simply cut across the lawn. The ruts its wheels left in the soft turf were clearly visible in the moonlight.

At that point a car turned into the Cobb driveway. I ran over to it. It was the old station-wagon. James Ray Cobb got out. There was a puzzled expression on his face.

"Morgan," he called, as I showed in the twin cornucopias of his headlights, "is that you? What's going on here?"

"Darned if I know—" I began.

"Where," interrupted Cobb sharply, "is Bea going at this time of night? I saw her drive out as I came up. And she was driving fast. Too fast. She nearly collided with me."

Bea in the car that had raced away? Unbelievable!

"You're sure it was she?" I said.

"Absolutely. I saw her."

I didn't get it. My mind was a whirlpool. But I did know what to do next.

"Mr. Cobb," I said, "something is very wrong. I'm following Bea."

He looked at me a second. Then: "Want me to go along, Morgan? I'm sometimes handy if there's trouble."

"I sure do," I said instantly. I'd long since decided that Cobb would be a good guy to have on your side.

"Then we'll take your car," he said. "Mine's too slow."

THE road was clear. Far down it I thought I saw the momentary wink of a tail-light. It vanished instantly and I put the accelerator to the floor. As we tore along I told Cobb, in short jerky sentences, as much as I knew.

He was silent for a space while I stepped on it, straining my eyes for another glimpse of Bea's tail-light.

"That's very strange, Morgan," he said presently. "I don't pretend to understand it. But you're probably wondering what I'm doing out at this hour. The fact is, I had business in Tampa today and it kept me late."

It wasn't until we reached the causeway that I picked up Bea's light again. Then she was almost halfway across. I swore and urged my hired jalopy on. But it was an uneven race. Bea's car was almost new. Mine, while a lot faster than the old Ford, was more or less of a hack.

At that, and to my surprise, I gained on Bea going over the causeway. As I ran off it, her car was just breasting the hill into Brightwater proper.

I rushed the jalopy up the hill and was in time to see her make a left turn. Three solid miles, I kept her in sight but couldn't catch up with her. She seemed to be toying with me. Every time my headlights got close enough to drench the back of her car in yellow, she stepped away from me. It was like a race between Whirlaway and a willing selling-plater that just didn't have enough.

"Look," Cobb said suddenly. "She's taking the Springs road."

It was true. Up ahead Bea's car made another left turn.

Once clear of the town, I made my big effort. But it was no use. I couldn't get up to her. The roadster simply ghosted ahead of me, its swaying tail-lamp like a red will-o'-the-wisp. I had all I could do to keep close enough to get intermittent flashes of it.

We came to a straight level stretch. I was at least three hundred yards behind and not gaining when, suddenly, Bea made still another turn to the left.

"Where the devil's she going now?" I demanded of Cobb, through clenched teeth.

He was staring straight ahead. "Unless I'm very much mistaken, she's turned into that abandoned hotel—Headwinds House."

Headwinds House? The name spun in my brain. What under heaven had induced Bea Westfall to turn in there? The night of the storm, when we'd taken refuge in the gloomy deserted building, she'd been scared silly of this place. Now here she was racing for it, like one possessed.

"There's something awfully screwy about this," I said.

I swung down the side road toward Headwinds House. The black lonely structure rose starkly into the glare of my lights. Then the portico and Bea's car parked under it. And something else. Something small and dark lying on the ground near her right rear wheel.

I was out of my car like a shot, Cobb right behind me. We dashed for the roadster. It was empty. And the thing on the ground was that big bandana Bea used for tying over her head to keep her hair from blowing.

"She's here somewhere, all right," I said grimly. "Come on."

Something flashed in Cobb's hands. It was a pocket torch. Well, thank God, he had one. As usual, I hadn't. Behind its ray we rushed into the darkened building.

I remembered pounding through innumerable rooms on the ground floor. I remember the ring of our footsteps and the dank musty smell of the place. I remember

Cobb's flashlight playing over bare walls and into shadowy corners. I remember shouting Bea's name and getting nothing in response but an eerie wailing echo.

"There's nothing on this floor, that's certain," I panted at last. "Let's try upstairs."

That was when Cobb said "Wait!" tersely, gripped my arm and clicked off his torch.

I was aware of it almost as soon as he, a sound like a door slamming somewhere beneath us.

"Not upstairs, Morgan," Cobb said, in a low voice. "Down."

His light played again. I saw that we were standing near a staircase. We crept down it, softly now, and into a chamber that had probably been designed as a billiard or card-room. The ceiling here was lower. Cobb's light, used judiciously, made weird circles on the far wall.

We crossed the room noiselessly, came to a passageway. And Cobb's torch went out again.

I saw why instantly. At the end of the passage there was a feeler of light at floor level. Obviously it was showing from under a door.

We edged forward in the darkness. I could feel Cobb's shoulder brushing mine; hear his heavy labored breathing. The sliver of light beneath the door was a thin yellow line. Then we were up to it and I pressed my ear against the door. There was no sound from within.

"Hear anything?" Cobb's voice, close to my ear, was like a low hiss.

"No," I whispered back. "I'll try the knob. If the door's locked, we'll bust it open. Okay?"

I didn't wait for his answer. I grabbed the knob, gave it a quick turn. To my astonishment, the door opened easily.

So easily, in fact, that I was thrown off balance by the shove I'd given it. I stumbled across the doorsill and almost fell into a huge room. And then I stopped short, something like a cold finger curving around my heart.

The room was lit by a flickering uncertain lantern. In its struggling beam I saw that three quarters of the space, from floor to ceiling, was literally choked with boxes and packing cases. And upon a box, a large coffin-like box in the foreground, lay Bea Westfall. On the same box, his ugly seamed face twisted in a grin, sat Birdsell, Cobb's ex-chauffeur. Birdsell had a gun in his hand.

Gun or no gun, I gave a kind of barking cry and started forward. But Birdsell was on his feet like a cat. He jabbed the gun into my stomach, his grin fading.

"That'll be far enough, young fella," he growled. "And don't try no tricks."

I hadn't any intention of trying tricks. The gun, hard against my solar plexus, was as mean-looking as the guy who held it. The thing that had driven me forward involuntarily was the sight of Bea and a horrible fear. The fear lessened now as, straining my eyes in the weak light, I could see the rise and fall of her breasts. But she was out, out cold. And her face was the color of death.

I took a backward step. Birdsell edged after me, his gun still at my stomach, and his little eyes beady.

"Now then, Mr. Morgan, raise your hands slowly. And keep them raised."

I FELT my feet almost leave the floor. My mouth dropped open, the room swam, and something caught at my throat. Because that low cold voice wasn't Birdsell's. It came from behind me—from James Ray Cobb. "What in God's name—" I burst out, but the same level icy voice cut me off:

"I said, raise your hands, Morgan."

Dumbly I obeyed. I felt my pockets slapped from behind. My mind was a pinwheel, going crazy.

"You may turn around now, Morgan."

I turned slowly. I turned to face a man that I thought I knew. But I didn't know him at all. It was as if a sorcerer had laid a sudden and subtle spell upon James

Ray Cobb. There were the same blue eyes; the same rugged face and jutting jaw. But the eyes were narrowed now, to slits. And all kindness and geniality had vanished from his face. Upon it, instead, was an expression of stark brutality; a gloating look that turned my blood to ice. I felt as if I were confronted by a beast.

Cobb's right hand held an automatic, wicked and blue.

AS I stared at him, sweat drenching my forehead, he inclined his head at Birdsell. "You may go now, Birdsell," he said. "I want to handle this alone. Follow my instructions carefully. Don't fail, Birdsell."

His voice was like a low, satisfied purr. Birdsell, grinning at me, shuffled from the room.

"Well, Morgan," said Cobb, his eyes still slits, "you seem a little—shall we say, taken aback?"

I fought the fear and confusion crowding my mind. I fought for calmness, as I'd never fought for it before.

"I am," I said, and felt my voice almost flutter. "Possibly you'll tell me what is going on?"

He took a step toward me. "Gladly, Morgan. In fact, I brought you here to tell you, before—but that can wait. No doubt you consider my—my little ruse for getting you here somewhat elaborate. But I like making elaborate plans and executing them without a hitch. There is the satisfaction of accomplishment in it."

I shook my head. "I'm afraid I don't understand, Mr. Cobb."

"You will, Morgan." He held the gun low, but pointed straight at me. "I haven't much time, but enough to clear matters up for you. To begin with, your bureau in New York did you a disfavor when they sent you down here to spy on my organization."

I started. What was the guy getting at?

"Listen," I said, "I came here on vacation. I didn't even know you had an organization."

He chuckled. "Well, I have, Morgan: a small, but highly efficient one. As for your vacation, rubbish! You are what is known as a G-man, aren't you?"

"Yes," I said. "But—"

"And quite a distinguished G-man, too. You came to the attention of our—of one of our branches when you shot Erich Moldauer in El Paso. We have had you under surveillance ever since."

So James Ray Cobb was a German agent. And he knew about Erich Moldauer. Right then I wouldn't have given a plugged nickel for my chances of seeing daybreak.

"Moldauer," Cobb was saying, "was one of our best men and a keen loss to us. I am happy that I have the opportunity to avenge his death."

The ice that was in my veins seemed to move, then thicken.

"I was a little hasty the other night," Cobb went on, "when I shot at you from outside the hotel. But afterward I was glad I had missed. You see, I forgot one of the methods that my people in Germany use so effectively. They work on the mind, Morgan, as well as on the body." Pure fanaticism gleamed from his hooded eyes. "To have snuffed you out with a single shot would, after all, have been letting you off too easy. It was far more—er—exquisite to lure you here tonight; to accompany you and watch you going through mental tortures because you thought Miss Westfall in danger. Because—you are in love with Miss Westfall, aren't you, Morgan?" He peered at me.

"Yes," I said listlessly. "I'm in love with her." What was the use of denying it?

"Ha! I thought so. I've watched you two together, and your face is very readable. Well, you will be relieved to know that, from tonight on, I shall make myself personally responsible for Miss Westfall."

I was looking at a gun. But it took all I had to keep from flying at his throat. I crushed the burning desire down. It would have been crazy. My only chance of help-

ing Bea lay in stalling; in waiting for something—a miracle—to happen.

"I don't understand that either," I said. My voice was dry, high-pitched.

"No? It's very simple. When Miss Westfall returned home tonight, my man Birdsell was waiting for her just inside her door. Quite gently, Morgan, he took charge of her. He carried her into her own garage where it was necessary to inject a slight opiate. She went to sleep very peacefully, he tells me. Then I arranged a telephone call to you. And you came, as I foresaw. Quite a lot of trouble to take, of course, but"—he shrugged—"it amused me to do it that way. By the way, Birdsell's a splendid driver, isn't he? He played with you on the way over here."

I gritted my teeth. For the chance to murder this sadistic swine, I'd have given both eyes.

"What are you going to do with Miss Westfall?" I said.

Cobb smiled. "Briefly, Morgan, she is starting for Germany. Within the next two hours."

"Germany!" I screamed and lunged forward. But his gun whipped up instantly.

"Easy, Morgan. Don't excite yourself. Beatrice will be very happy in Germany. You see, I—possibly I seem a little elderly to you—but I have conceived a deep attachment to her."

I stared at him, almost in fascination. The man was certainly a raving lunatic. More forcibly, it was borne in on me that my only chance lay in stalling.

"But Bea telephoned me?" I said.

"You are very naive," Cobb laughed. "Miss Starr telephoned you at my orders. She disguised her voice with a handkerchief tied over her mouth."

Margo? That swell girl? It was incredible!

"Don't think harshly of Miss Starr," Cobb said. "She knew nothing about what I have in mind for you. She is merely a minor member of my organization, and does what I tell her. Her function was to check on you, when possible, and report your movements to me. While she was out with you tonight, I received an important message. And I deemed it necessary to call Miss Starr after you people got back and have her impersonate Miss Westfall. She seems to have done it very well. Miss Starr also searched your room the other night. But that was routine. We did not expect to find anything of value."

I remembered, then. Margo, coming late for our date on the beach. And afterward, my discovery that the clock had been moved. But Margo, a member of a subversive ring! I couldn't get over it.

"Miss Starr," Cobb continued, "also managed to get your gun one night on the beach. It seems, Morgan"—he leered at me—"that you are rather susceptible where women are concerned."

Susceptible? I was the grandfather of all the dopes.

"And I suppose," I said, striving to keep the conversation going, "that you or one of your pals shot that fellow Kyle?"

"Oh, Kyle." Cobb's voice was absolutely offhanded. "I was coming to him. Tell me, Morgan, did you have any dealings with Kyle?"

"Not exactly. But he warned me, in a bar, to get the hell out of here."

COBB nodded. "I suspected something like that. Kyle was relatively new to our organization. He trailed you down from New York. But the moment he got here, our little crowd had a meeting and Kyle and I disagreed over money. He turned threatening and, from what you tell me, carried out his threat, partially. I was wise to get rid of him."

Well, that explained another thing—Margo had known Kyle and the sight of him dead on the beach brought on her hysterics.

"And now, Morgan," Cobb began ominously, "if you've no more questions—"

"I have," I said quickly. "Birdsell crashed into us purposely that night, didn't he?"

"I very much regret that," Cobb said, "on account of Miss Westfall. Birdsell was up here checking our stocks"—he waved his hand at the collection of boxes—"these, by the way, are drugs and medicines for our soldiers and people in Germany, Morgan. Well, Birdsell was here when you and Miss Westfall blundered in. He got very excited, thinking you had discovered our hiding-place, and exceeded himself. But fortunately Miss Westfall wasn't hurt, and I—well, I reproved Birdsell in your presence."

"Which was an act."

"Yes. An act. Now I've pandered sufficiently to your curiosity. Have you got anything else to say?"

I was watching him. Watching his gun, his eyes, his feet. But there wasn't a chance. His slitted eyes were bright, alert.

I said: "Yes. One thing. I'm getting damned tired of holding my hands up."

Cobb gave a harsh laugh. "Put them down then, you fool. It can't matter. You've only got another minute."

I felt cold sweat pour down my face. But I managed to say: "How do you propose to get this stuff, and Bea Westfall, to Germany?"

HE saw through my frantic effort to prolong the conversation. He gestured impatiently. "I haven't time to go into that. Move backward, Morgan. Stand against those cases. They'll serve"—his smile was bleak, cruel—"in lieu of a wall."

Well, this seemed to be it. But I had one card left. I played it.

"Do you mind if I wipe my face?" I asked.

He looked surprised. "Well, be quick," he said. "And use that handkerchief in your outside pocket. I don't think you've a gun on your hip, but I'm taking no chances."

I pulled out the handkerchief, wiped my face. I held the handkerchief by one end and moved it back toward my pocket.

"Listen," I said, "are you actually going to shoot me for killing a swine like Erich Moldauer?"

I've been lucky in my life. But never more lucky than I was at that moment. Cobb gave a snarl of rage. He stepped forward, thrust his heavy granite jaw within three feet of mine. The gun trembled in his hand. It was better than I'd dared hope for.

"You," he said in a low grating voice, "you presume to call an honorable German gentleman a—"

I snapped the handkerchief into his face as you snap a wet towel.

It's an old dodge, but a good one. You tie a chunk of lead about the size of a marble in one corner of a handkerchief. A quick flick of it, especially if you catch somebody's eye, is often enough to give you a momentary advantage in a brawl. I always carry a handkerchief loaded like that, in the outside pocket of my jacket, where I can get at it.

I didn't catch Cobb's eye. But I heard the lead crack against his temple. He staggered back, and I threw my body to the right and struck out with my left hand, all in one quick motion. I knocked his gun upward. But not soon enough. The gun blazed.

Something whammed my left arm, bit and stung—the same arm Moldauer had put out of business temporarily, when he winged my shoulder, and now I felt it go limp. And I had about the millionth of a second to throw a right. If I missed—well, I'd be all through.

I put everything I had into that short choppy punch. It didn't miss. It took Cobb on the point of the jaw. He reeled, but stayed on his feet. And I swarmed over him, clutching for the gun.

I got my fingers around his wrist and hung on. He was twice my age, but it took every ounce of my strength to

keep that gun pointed toward the ceiling. It exploded twice more as we wrestled around that ungodly room, with Bea Westfall an unconscious spectator and the uncertain guttering lantern throwing off pale weird light. Cobb was strong, terribly strong. That clip to the chin had knocked him backward, but it hadn't scrambled his brain. He cursed me and lashed out with his left hand, beating and clawing at my face.

I took a real going-over before I finally shook the gun loose. It fell with a metallic clatter to the stone floor. Carrying me with him, Cobb dived after it. But I managed to kick it. The sound it made scraping over the floor and out of the way was the sweetest music I'd ever heard.

And then it was just Cobb and me, with no holds barred. My left hand was useless, so there was only one thing to do. I let go of his wrist and grabbed his throat, trying to hold him off. I might as well have tried to hold off Niagara.

He had two good arms and a fanatical will to live. He bore me backward, flailing with both hands, slammed me against the far wall. I went down, with him on top of me. But I had the sense to roll over quickly and I caught him off balance. And, suddenly, I was on top, beating his head against the floor.

I might have finished James Ray Cobb off myself, for good and all, if that—that specter hadn't appeared suddenly in the doorway.

Because she did look like a specter even though, under her loose gray coat, she wore a high-necked black dress. And she came as silently, as eerily, as a specter. Her face, in the livid light, would have been a putty-colored mask, save for the eyes. The eyes were like embers fanned to fury.

Mrs. James Ray Cobb. Standing in the doorway some fiend of vengeance. And in her hand a deadly little revolver.

I was aware of a horrible shriveling feeling, as if all the blood were already running out of me. But at the same time, strangely enough, I had a lucid thought about the irony of everything. Here I had taken the thousandth chance against Cobb and brought it off. I'd come within a hair of saving Bea Westfall and my own skin, too. But now, this terrible unexpected break! I darn' nearly went all to pieces.

I didn't, because of one thing. It flashed through my mind that I wasn't going to die writhing on the floor, like a rat. If my number was coming up, I was going to be on my feet and watch it come.

I gave Cobb's head one more bang, for luck, staggered up and fell back against the packing-cases. I could hardly stand. But I made myself stand, and face Mrs. Cobb.

And Mrs. Cobb gave me just one brief glance out of her burning eyes. She raised her left hand, made a queer inexplicable little gesture. Then her gun cracked.

Three times it cracked, short sharp barks. And I saw what I saw but, seeing it, couldn't believe it. For three bullets burned and tore their way into the quivering body of James Ray Cobb. He screamed once, hoarsely, like some big stricken animal, started up, then fell back, rolled over on his face and lay still. And Mrs. Cobb tossed the little gun down beside his body.

ON what happened in the next few minutes, I'm not too clear. I was close to passing out. But all at once there came a pounding of feet in the passageway. A blue cloud of cops swarmed into the room and in the middle of them, although I was sure I was seeing things, was Mr. Fordyce. A couple of cops grabbed Mrs. Cobb and dimly I heard her saying, "Yes, I shot him. And I'm glad of it. I've been his dupe for twenty years. But I couldn't stand this." And she pointed listlessly to the unconscious figure of Bea Westfall.

Two cops took Mrs. Cobb away.

Fordyce came over to me. "You all right, Morgan?" "I—I guess so," I said uncertainly. "Wh-what the devil are you doing here?"

"First," Fordyce said, "we'll get Miss Westfall out of this. Because"—he looked at me significantly—"there might be some more shooting."

He ordered two other cops to take Bea home. He instructed them to get a doctor, to make sure she was all right. He seemed to be in complete control of the situation and, believe me, I was glad of it. Myself, I felt pretty foggy.

"Now then, Morgan," said Fordyce, "you come with me."

He led me out of that dim, evil-smelling room and upstairs. We went outside to what had been designed as the veranda of Headwinds House. It was still quite dark, but there was just the barest suggestion of light off to the east. I took in huge lungfuls of crisp cool air. A lick of damp wind, off the Gulf, fanned my face. I began to feel slightly more alive.

"I think you'd better talk first," Fordyce said. "And talk fast. Because we haven't much time."

CHAPTER TEN



TALKED fast. I told him everything.

"So?" he said, when I'd finished. "Do you know what licked Cobb, Morgan? It was arrogance. He thought he could do anything and everything. Arrogance is an innate German characteristic and it always licks 'em in the end."

While he spoke Fordyce was straining his eyes toward the Gulf. I looked that way too. But the moon had faded and I couldn't see anything.

"I agree," I said. "But just how did arrogance lick Cobb?"

Fordyce said enigmatically: "If Cobb had acted at once on an unexpected message he received tonight from certain friends of his, he might at least have saved his friends. It's even conceivable that he might have been able to carry out his entire plan. But evidently he was bent on making you pay for shooting Moldauer. Fortunately you were out enjoying yourself and didn't get back until late. He waited for you. Well, we'd intercepted the message and his delay gave us time to decode it and act. So—we were ready for him."

"Who," I said, confused, "is 'we'?"

Fordyce chuckled. "I owe you an apology, Morgan. For not telling you right away that you and I are in the same line of business."

I stared at him unbelievably. "You mean you're in the Department too?"

"Have been for years. Head of the Chicago Bureau at one time. But they sent me down here when Cobb and his activities first came to our attention."

"Then why,"—I was almost sore at him,—"didn't you take me into your confidence? You must think I'm a bum G-man."

"Because," said Fordyce, "I had strict orders not to. We had this situation in hand and you were supposed to be recuperating. As for your being a bum G-man, I wouldn't know about that. But Headquarters must think you're all right. Confidentially, they've got other work waiting for you. In Central America, I understand."

Well, what do you know? And I'd blundered into his case with all the tact of an elephant. But he'd intimated that I'd helped unwittingly by going jigging with Margo and that was some consolation.

Fordyce said, his eyes still on the Gulf: "Of course, I've watched Cobb like a hawk. I trailed him to the beach the night he shot Kyle. Naturally, I didn't dream that he had already shot at you. But you may have noticed,

Morgan, that I've kept pretty close to you lately. Ever since you told me about that queer auto accident, I suspected that Cobb might have it in for you. But I couldn't foresee all this business tonight. The man I had posted outside here reported everyone who went in. But he didn't recognize the girl who was carried in as Miss Westfall and we couldn't interfere sooner than we did or a— a very important plan might have been spoiled. I didn't like letting you walk into danger, but I had to trust you to handle yourself." He turned to me and smiled. "Thought you could, all right. Particularly since Cobb was shooting blanks."

"Blanks?" I explained and stopped, realizing suddenly that I hadn't given my left arm a thought for the heck of a time.

"Blanks," confirmed Fordyce. "The wadding stings when it hits you at close range, doesn't it? We managed to get into Cobb's house and substitute blanks the day he and his missus went to St. Pete. Figured he wouldn't carry any of his guns that day. He wasn't taking any chances on the Sullivan law. Oh, he was a fine patriotic citizen, Cobb was. Letting it be known that he saved rubber and bought war bonds. Mrs. Cobb, though, was another story. She must have kept her little gun with her—for we didn't come across it. And just as well. She saved the Government from having to stand Cobb up against a wall and waste bullets on him."

"How," I asked, "did Mrs. Cobb get wise to his neat little plan about Bea—about Miss Westfall?"

Fordyce shrugged. "We won't know that unless Mrs. Cobb chooses to tell us. My guess is that Cobb paid certain—well, courteous attentions to Miss Westfall, but Mrs. C. got suspicious. She may have investigated the shenanigans at the Westfall place tonight, put two and two together and followed you people up here in Cobb's station-wagon. She did use that, by the way. Of course, she was in this drug thing with her husband."

"Then he did really have a drug racket on behalf of Germany?"

"Absolutely. Knock open those cases down there and you'll find every drug in the category. Sulfas, adrenalin, mercury, iodine and the Lord knows what all. Cobb—or Rudolph Heinzer as his name was once—really had been in the wholesale drug business. He'd even been an American citizen for twenty-five years. But, to him, that didn't mean a thing."

"A nice clean-cut guy—" I began. But Fordyce cut me short.

"Ah," he said, in a satisfied whisper. "There she goes."

From our corner of the veranda we could see to both east and west. Westward, over the Gulf, hung an iron-gray gloom. But to the east a faint light, touched at the edges with livid fire, infiltrated the sky. Fordyce, though, hadn't looked to the east when he gave that soft exultant exclamation. His eyes had been dead ahead, on the Gulf. Down at the edge of it, perhaps three hundred yards from where we stood, was another, and more definite, light.

A queer light. It was small, but clearly defined in the gradually retreating darkness. It moved. Slowly, almost maddeningly, it described a circle. One circle. Another. Then another. And, all at once, came an answering flash, from the gloom of the Gulf itself.

I got it then. Or thought I did.

"Birdsell?" I said.

Fordyce's voice was almost a purr. "No, not Birdsell this time. Birdsell did give that same signal some time ago. That's when my men collared him. You see, they had to wait till he had given the come-on signal to find out what the come-on signal was. But once they knew it they waited a while before giving it again. Waited for it to get lighter so we could operate more easily. That's one of our fellows using the torch now."

It was still pretty much Greek to me. I said, "Listen, Mr. Fordyce, what is this all about?"

He laughed. "Haven't you guessed, Morgan? You're about to have the rare privilege of watching the Nazis turn over a couple of perfectly good submarines to Uncle Sam—free of charge."

Was I? Well, my head ached so that I couldn't take in the magnitude of it just then.

We waited in silence for a few minutes. Then, suddenly, from the Gulf, the white beam of a searchlight sprayed the shore.

Fordyce gave his dry chuckle. "They're picking up the inlet. They can float right up to the wharf down there. But they can't submerge anywhere near here." He chuckled again. "It's too shallow."

"But they can float out if they get suspicious," I objected.

"Can they?" Fordyce said. "Wait and see."

A moment passed during which I asked, "Did the message you spoke of intercepting come from the subs?"

He nodded. "They radioed Cobb—he's got a receiving set somewhere that we haven't found yet. They radioed that on orders, orders from Germany I presume, the job had to be done tonight. It caught me a little by surprise. Because we were tipped off that Cobb was expecting another large drug consignment in a day or two. I hadn't expected to set the net tonight. And, believe me, I had to work fast. That's why Cobb made a fatal mistake in waiting. If he'd given up his plans respecting you and Miss Westfall and signaled them in earlier, he might have gotten away with it. I think we could have stopped him, even so. But he might well have warned the U-boats off."

Then, suddenly, dawn broke. And I gasped. Just off shore floated two long objects, shaped like gigantic gray cigars. Toys of Mr. Hitler, nosing into Florida.

"They're sure to show fight," I said.

"Let 'em!" Fordyce smacked his lips. "Do you see that marshland on each side of the inlet? Where the high reeds are? Well, it's alive with United States Marines. From the Dunedin base."

I'm telling you, that information gave me the thrill of a lifetime.

It grew lighter, by the second. And as the shadows lifted from the Gulf, I grabbed Fordyce's arm.

"Look!" I exclaimed.

Far back of the U-boats other shapes were moving in the dim distance. Deadly, clean-lined shapes, maneuvering slowly. Three, four, five of them.

"Exactly," said Fordyce, without emotion. "Destroyers and corvettes standing by. The subs can't go forward and they can't go back. They're like rats in a trap. And if anything should slip, we've a field telephone here. Bombing planes from Tampa could be over the Gulf in a few minutes. Pretty, isn't it, Morgan?"

"Pretty" was the hell of a word for it. It was magnificent. And if you ever get a chance to see a company of U. S. Marines, springing as if from the fabled dragon's teeth out of reedy marshes in the lilac-and-steel of dawn, run—do not walk. Because it's a fine reassuring sight.

The subs never had a chance and they knew it. They surrendered, hands down.

AUNT EDITH on the other end of the phone, said to me, a mite sharply I thought: "If you call once again this afternoon, Sandy Morgan, I shall have the company disconnect our telephone. Beatrice is perfectly all right. But she's sleeping. Now you just relax."

How do you like that, and me the one who'd snatched Aunt Edith out from under a cloud of chloroform? I hung up. I felt very unhappy. Nobody seemed to want my services or society.

Nevertheless, I impinged my society upon Mandalay Cottage around nine that night. I had to see Bea, that was all there was about it.

I found her sitting on the veranda, looking very recovered and very beautiful. Aunt Edith, bless her, was nowhere to be seen.

"Oh, hello, Sandy," said Bea. "I thought you'd probably look in."

Her tone was such as she might have used to a meter-reader. It did not encourage me.

"I am calling," I said stiffly, "to inquire about your health. It's a formal call. Because I understand you're mad at me."

"My health is excellent, thanks," said Bea. "And annoyed is the word." She paused, and shook her head. "Imagine you kissing that theatrical-looking girl right out in front of the Billows in plain view of everybody. And just a few hours after you'd asked me to marry you. I'm afraid you're rather—er—light-minded, Sandy."

So that was it? And she was jealous. Wonderful!

"Where were you?" I asked, for the record.

"In the car you parked next to."

"Hat!" I said. "Then you saw that the girl kissed me of her own volition. I had nothing whatsoever to do with it."

"Well, maybe not," said Bea. "But I didn't see you struggling to get away. It was much like a movie fade-out, I thought."

I decided that the veranda was no place to continue this conversation.

"Miss Westfall," I said, "I have something to say to you. Would you care to walk on the beach?"

I LOOKED her down to the water's edge. That moon was kidding around in the sky and laying a broad white ribbon across the breast of the Gulf. The waves came in slowly, lacing the shoreline with silver.

"I wish to know," I said severely, "what you were doing in a parked and darkened automobile? With a big shot from the Navy, I presume?"

"I don't mind telling you," said Bea. "I was listening to the second proposal I'd had yesterday. It was quite a day for me."

I started, fearfully, visibly, but kept control of my voice. "Yes? And what did you tell the admiral?"

"That I'd think it over."

"Did you mention Mr. X in Winkona?"

"Mr. X in Winkona? What are you talking about?"

Life grew a touch brighter. There obviously wasn't any Mr. X in Winkona. The field had narrowed. It was just me against the Navy now.

"Sandy," said Bea, an adroit subject-switcher, "I haven't thanked you for what you did for me last night. Mr. Fordyce came over after dinner and told me all about it. He said you were splendid. He said a lot of other things which would make you conceited if you heard them." She stopped and shuddered. "Oh, Sandy, wasn't it awful? Mr. Cobb turning out to be such a—a devil and Mrs. Cobb killing— Oh, I just don't want to think about it."

"Don't," I said. "It interrupts my train of thought. Now respecting this admiral. You say he proposed?"

She turned to me. Her face was a lovely oval carved out of soft moonlight. "Beautifully, Sandy. And so romantically. You should study his technique. He didn't say, as you would, 'Well, babe, how's about it?' He—"

"Listen," I said. "I don't want to hear what this seafaring man said to you. Because I can say all he did, only better, in four short words."

"You, Sandy?" Bea laughed, a sound of silvery derision. "Never. You're far too garrulous."

"Is that right? Well, listen!"

"I'm listening."

I said, with, for the first time in my life, exactly the proper inflection "I love you, darling."

Bea looked up at me, almost startled. A couple of stars slid down and stood in her eyes.

"Why, Sandy," she said. "Why, Sandy Morgan. I didn't think you had it in you. But I do believe you've trumped the admiral. Would you like to kiss me?"

Which was an all-time tops in fool questions.

Famous War Pictures



"Napoleon in Hell," by *Antoine Joseph Wiertz*

NEXT month, as a special feature, we plan to publish reproductions of a number of memorable drawings and paintings inspired by past wars. We are doing this with the idea that they may suggest to present-day artists, either civilian or with the armed forces, the desirability of making pictures of this global war which will be something more than mere photographs—pictures with an idea behind them.

We had originally intended, for instance, to have Mr. Flanagan or some other competent penman redraw the picture we reproduce above, casting Hitler in the title rôle; on second thought, however, we could not imagine the Schickelgruber fellow taking his punishment with a certain dignity as Napoleon is

represented—nor could we imagine any adequate punishment!

With this pictorial feature will appear an even better than usual assemblage of fiction: A short mystery novel complete, called "The Blackout Murder Case," by F. W. Bronson; the second fine installment of Robert Ormond Case's "Rocky Mountain;" one of the best of H. Bedford-Jones' series "Flag Outward Bound;" another of Arch Whitehouse's lively and authentic stories of war in the air; another of Gordon Keyne's dramas of Tomorrow, "Bagdad Madness;" and many other notable stories by such writers as Bertram Atkey, William Brandon, Kenneth Perkins, Achmed Abdullah and the like—all in the next, the May issue of,

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